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"STOP!" HISSED AMBROSE, IN THE KICKAPOO DIALECT, AS HIS STRONG ARMS HELD HER POWERLESS,
"IF YOU ARE QUIET, I WILL NOT HARM YOU."

The Giant Hunter;

OR,

The Mad Scourge of the Kickapoos.

A Romance of the Frontier.

BY HARRY HAZARD.

CHAPTER I.

TWO PROPOSALS.

"BAH! I'm a fool! What is she more than a bit of flesh and blood, though done up in a more dainty parcel than usual, after all? Nothing. And I'm a man, ain't I? There's not many 'round about here who would care to openly doubt *that*, I opine," and a short, metallic laugh ended the sentence.

The speaker was apparently a young man, though this must be inferred from his figure and carriage, rather than features, for the sun had some time since disappeared behind the western horizon. The moon, in its second quarter, cast a faint light down upon the little clearing, at the edge of which stood the person introduced, enough to reveal his sex and race, but nothing more.

He stood leaning one hand upon the muzzle of a rifle, gazing intently before him. The most noticeable object in that direction was a small building: a story and a half cabin, standing upon a slight knoll, that sloped gradually back and to either hand, spreading out into a fair-sized field that already gave promise of good crops.

Toward this, then, was the gaze of the young man directed, but more particularly upon a faint glow of light, that shone flickeringly through an uncurtained window. Occasionally a dimly outlined figure could be seen passing to and fro, momentarily intercepting this light.

"Yes, that's it—no one would say I was not a man, to look at these limbs," and he outstretched his arms, complacently eying them. "And yet I'm afraid of her—that little chit of a girl! I wonder if I am turning coward in my old age?" and he laughed again, with the same cold, hard ring in his tones.

"Ambrose Wraxall, don't be a fool as well as a coward. You want a wife—you love Ellen Todd—then go and tell her so. She can't say more than no, and you've changed greatly from the past if you let *that* discourage you. You've walked half a dozen miles to tell her this, to-night, and now you're almost near enough, you tremble like a boy drawing bead on his first red-skin. Bah!"

This man was evidently a bit of an oddity, for he did not spare himself, nor mince matters in the least, during his soliloquy—if such it may be called. But then, as the exclamation broke from his lips for the second time, he jerked the long rifle to the hollow of his left arm, and strode forward, with swift, vigorous footsteps.

His figure, thus more clearly revealed, was indeed one to amply justify, if not extenuate, the rather egotistical communings of the hunter. It was above the common height—measuring fully two yards, if not more—and while each limb

was massive in its mold, all presented a rare picture of athletic grace and activity.

A few moments sufficed to carry him to the rude stone step of the cabin, and then his knuckles smote the rough slab door heavily.

There sounded a little bustle from within, when a heavy tread approached the door. This swung open, and a gray-haired man stood revealed, holding a long-stemmed pipe in his hand.

"Good-evening, Mr. Todd," uttered the young man, in a tone which, while yet musical and mellow, was of remarkable depth and compass.

"Why, 'Brose, my boy, how d' y'? Come in—come in! Glad to see you, raily. Purty nigh a stranger, you air, o' late. Come in," heartily cried the old settler, as he grasped the extended hand with his own horny palm, pressing it warmly.

"I've been quite busy—that must be my excuse," said Wraxall, entering the doorway, and glancing quickly around him. "Good-evening to you all. No need to ask if you have been well since I was here last—your looks show that, plainly."

"It holds good 'bout you, too, then, 'Brose," returned an old lady, seated near one end of the fireplace. "You *do* look unkimmin spruce to-night; don't he, Ellen?" and she gave a faint chuckle, while her black eyes snapped merrily, rivaling the bright, flashing knitting-needles.

"Thank you," softly uttered Wraxall, as he accepted the chair proffered by the girl addressed as Ellen by her mother.

"You know Tony, don't ye, 'Brose?" asked Mr. Todd, nodding toward the opposite end of the huge fireplace, where sat a young man, at the same time stooping down to crowd a fresh coal into the bowl of his pipe.

"Yes, I have had an introduction to Mr. Ingo, I believe," rather stiffly replied Wraxall, as his large eyes rested upon the flushed countenance of the youth.

Though the words were unexceptionable, considered apart, yet a feeling of constraint settled down upon the little group, and for some time silence was maintained. And as we may have to deal, more or less extensively, with these characters, a brief description may not be amiss, before proceeding further.

First, there was stout Ezra Todd; a man long since past his prime, if years alone be considered, but whose frame contained not a little muscular strength and activity. His wife, Sarah, was but little younger, and bore her years equally as well. A brisk, bustling little body was she, with tongue a little sharp at times, it may be, but none the less loved for that, by those who knew her best.

Ellen Todd was what would be called a beautiful woman in almost any circle. Rather above the average height of women, of a figure full and rounded, that appeared perfect, even in that coarse dress of homespun. In complexion a brunette, with glorious eyes, black and luminous, luxuriant hair, now coiled in a massive braid at the back of her queenly poised head. The full lips moist and red, in repose, had a slightly haughty air about their curve, that told of a strong and decisive will.

The young man who had been introduced as

Anthony Ingo, and whose face was now painfully flushed beneath the air of cool contempt that lurked in the words of the tall borderer, was the son of a near neighbor—near, in the parlance of the times, when all living within the radius of a dozen miles were so considered—and more than once had Dame Rumor whispered that he was “sparking Nell Todd.”

He was of a slight build, and even effeminate-looking. Though past majority, his cheek was beardless, and smooth as that of Nell herself, while the complexion rivaled hers in clearness.

By many of the ruder class of borderers and hunters, Tony—as he was familiarly known—was looked upon as a “poor spiritless coot,” who was fit for little else than to help the women-folk. He was not fond of hunting, or athletic sports, although he had more than once given proof that he was not unfitted for them.

Ambrose Wraxall was almost directly the opposite of this.

While Tony would be called a “pretty boy,” he was a handsome man. Rarely could a more perfect face or magnificent figure be found.

A blonde in type, with long, curling hair, heavy beard and mustache of a tawny hue, large blue eyes of great expression, a deep, sonorous, yet mellow voice, that harmonized well with his appearance.

He also was a farmer, though the farm's culture was mostly attended to by hired help, while the master roamed the wide forest or rolling plain with his gun, afoot or on his huge black horse. During the recent Indian troubles he had been one of the foremost actors—until his name was scarcely less widely known along the Illinois border than those of the Ogles, the Whitesides, Moores and others who occupy a prominent place in the history of that State—and his deeds were tinged with a ferocity that rendered him all the more popular among his wild compatriots.

In a short time after the arrival of Wraxall, the old folks retired for the night leaving the others still sitting before the fire. The conversation was desultory, being mainly sustained by Ambrose.

Tony Ingo seemed buried in deep thought, as his large eyes dwelt fixedly on the glowing coals, but an occasional quiver of his lips or a deepened flush upon his boyish cheek, told that not a word uttered by the stalwart suitor escaped his attention. Ellen Todd fidgeted uneasily.

No one knew better than did she, that both these men loved her, and wished her for a wife. But the knowledge rendered her less at ease now.

Conversation lagged, and the silence became oppressive.

Ellen sat demurely twisting an apron-string, while her shapely foot gently tapped the cleanly-swept hearth. But then, as if involuntarily, one plump hand rose to the red lips, to conceal an unmistakable yawn.

“Dear me!” said Ambrose, rising with a bustling air, “’tis growing late.”

“You have a long walk before you,” said Ellen, also arising.

“But soon got over. Ellen, I have something to tell you, that I don't care about others hearing. I've waited to see you alone, but now, as it

is so late, won't you step outside the door for a moment? The night is clear and warm. You will not catch cold,” hurriedly added Wraxall, with a glance of supreme disgust towards Ingo, whose face now flamed vividly, but who made no effort to move.

“Certainly, I will.”

Nell's words came prompt enough, but her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled, while her full lips parted just a trifle. Tony Ingo glanced quickly up into her face, with a penetrating look, that held the maiden's eyes as by a spell, for a second; but then she turned toward the door, where stood Wraxall.

Wraxall had fully resolved to learn his fate that night, and the first step being taken, he did not hesitate long. With gentle force he possessed himself of Nell's hand, drawing her toward the wide-spreading oak tree that stood but a few paces from the threshold.

He felt the brown, plump hand trembling in his strong clasp, and knowing that its fair owner was well aware of what was coming, he plunged at once into the subject.

“Nell, you know why I asked you to come out here?”

“No—why should I?” she faltered, making a futile effort to withdraw her hand from his broad palm.

“Well, I'll tell you, then. I wanted to ask you to become my wife. Wait—let me finish before you answer. You know that I love you; you must have read that in my actions toward you. Nell, I do love you better than my own life. You will never be offered a truer love, nor from one who will do more to make you happy and contented. I am young, strong, and have a little to start life with. You will not have a very hard life of it, if you can only return my love. And you do, don't you, little one?” he suddenly added, as he clasped the lithe figure of the maiden to his breast, and bowed his head toward hers.

“Wait,” cried Ellen, dexterously interposing her hand and checking the intended kiss. “Wait till I've answered you, Ambrose. First, are you sincere in what you have said, or is it only another of your stupid jokes?”

“Nell!”

“Well, then, I will answer you just as sincerely and candidly. I will not say that this surprises me, for I have thought it for some time. You say you love me, and that you wish me for your wife. Ambrose, I like you—as a friend, but I can be nothing more. We're too much alike in disposition to live happily together. We would both regret the act in a few months. Let us remain good friends yet, though we can be nothing more. We can forget all that has been said to-night, and go on as in the past. Shall it be so?”

“You may find it easy to forget—not I. Worse luck, I am not so fickle-minded. No, I can never forget. Nell—Nell! I love you—you *must* be mine,” hoarsely uttered the man, his stalwart figure quivering like a reed.

Ellen shrunk back from his outstretched arms, and the bright flush died out from her cheek.

Wraxall noted the change, and with a powerful effort, subdued his emotions. He drew his tall form erect, and stood before her with arms

folded tightly across his heaving chest. A faint smile played around his lips as he spoke:

"You need not be afraid, Nell. God knows that I would not harm one hair of your head for worlds. No—I love you too well for that. But tell me you were not in earnest—that you were only trying me. You *do* love me—you *will* love me, won't you, my little one?"

"I can not, Ambrose, in that way—other than as a brother. I like and esteem you very much, but not as—more like I would a brother. Forget it all, please. You can if you try. There are plenty more girls—"

"Stop, Nell; don't say that. You have hurt me enough already. We had better say good-by, now, for you do not love me. Nell, are you sure—is there *no* hope?" he added imploringly.

"Not of that. I am very sorry, but—"

"There. Good-by, and may God bless you, Nell. Don't think hard of me because I was fool enough to believe you could love such a great, rough bear as I am. Tell the old folks good by for me, please."

"Why, Ambrose, you speak just as though you did not expect ever to see them again!"

"And I may not. Do you think I could stay here, knowing that you were lost to me forever—perhaps see you learn to love some one else? Nell—Nell! these were bitter words for me to hear from *your* lips! And I love you so dearly!"

The deep voice of the rejected lover trembled with emotion, and his chest heaved convulsively. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he clasped the maiden to his heart and pressed a burning, passionate kiss full upon her lips.

The action was so unexpected that Nell could offer no resistance, and ere she could speak, the strong arms had relinquished her, and the giant borderer was striding rapidly away from the one he loved better than all else upon earth.

The maiden gazed after him with strangely conflicting emotions until the comely figure disappeared amidst the woodland shadows; then she turned, with a low sigh, and retraced her footsteps to the house.

Tony Ingo glanced quickly up from the fire as she entered, and his large, keen eyes closely scanned her face. A spasm shot athwart his countenance as he noted her changed expression, and arising from his chair, he glided to her side, placing a hand upon either shoulder, while his luminous eyes held her gaze spellbound.

"Nell," he uttered at length, and his voice sounded low and constrained; "Nell, tell me—what did Ambrose Wraxall say to you out there?"

"Tony, I— Don't ask me, for I can't tell you," she replied falteringly.

"Ellen, you *must*. I came here to-night to tell you something that has been weighing on my heart for a long time, and I don't like to leave a thing undone once begun. But unless I know what *he* told you, I can not say what I wish. He asked you to—to be his wife? Tell me."

Ingo's voice was low, but strangely commanding, and his eyes maintained their steady, magnetic gaze. The maiden faltered, but then uttered in a faint voice:

"He—yes, he did!"

"And you told him you would be? I feared it all along!"

"No—I—"

"No? Ellen, tell me truly—do you love this man?"

"No. That is, I don't think I do," she murmured, striving to free her hands.

"Thank God for that! I will speak now. Nell, darling, you know what I would say—I *love* you!"

"Oh, Tony!"

"Nell—tell me; say you love me. You do! Your eyes say so! My darling—all mine—mine alone, now!" and the slender arms wound tightly around the yielding form.

Her head sunk upon his heaving breast, and then their lips met in a long, lingering, delirious kiss of pure and ineffable bliss. Their hearts throbbed madly, their brains whirled dizzily, and they seemed drinking in long draughts of a fresh, new life, supremely happy, oblivious to all save that they loved and were beloved in return.

"My Nell—tell me that you love me. I can not believe that this great happiness is mine until I hear the words from your own lips," he whispered, as his arms quivered around her form.

"Tony, I *do* love you, very dearly," came the softly murmured words, so dear to true lovers' hearts.

But the curtain falls, to rise on more tragic scenes.

CHAPTER II.

A DARING OUTRAGE.

A DARK and blustering night, perhaps two weeks subsequent to that upon which our story opens.

But what is yonder strange, reddish glare that tinges the swiftly swirling storm-clouds? That changes the leaden masses into lurid phantoms, charging fiercely in aerial combat, and sends a wild thrill to the hearts of all who behold the vision?

There can be but one interpretation: It tells of fire—of a burning home—of terror-stricken human beings roused from a peaceful, dreamless slumber, to be driven forth from their home, out into the battling elements.

This glare of the burning homestead brings on the vision of marauding Indians, with all its attendant horrors; and as the neighbors are aroused from their repose by the lurid light, their trembling hands clutch their trusty weapons, and their ears hearken with dread lest they, too, are threatened by the same frightful peril.

While some look to the fastenings of the doors in an agony of apprehension, others sally forth, with sternly compressed lips, their horny hands clutching the deadly weapons, burning to wreak vengeance upon their common foe.

A huge black steed, with rider of herculean proportion, dashes madly along the faintly-defined road, leading by a rude log cabin, whose owner has just emerged from the door, with hands hastily adjusting his accouterments. One wrench of the strong arm checks the horse, and a deep voice utters:

"Hurry, Cole—there's deviltry afoot yonder! Hurry, or we'll be too late to do any good."

"Who is it—"

"Todd's cabin—don't you see?" came back the strong voice, as the mad rider vanished amid the gloom, thundering on toward the spot from whence ascends the terribly significant beacon.

That rider is Ambrose Wraxall. No wonder, then, at his furious haste, when he knows that the maiden whom he so desperately loved was in frightful peril.

Leaving the road, he struck into the timber, in his haste to reach the spot. And there only his marvelous quickness and acute vision saved him from destruction.

The trees stood thick, and their limbs hung low. One instant bending along his horse's neck, the next clinging to the saddle only by a foot, with hand wound in the thick mane, he sped along the winding, intricate bridle-path, like a strange phantom of the night.

The edge of the clearing was gained, and he burst from the woods at nearly the same point where we first beheld him, a fortnight previously. A hoarse cry gurgled from Wraxall's lips, and his huge frame trembled as if under the influence of an ague-shock.

The black horse abruptly paused, with a loud snort, leaning far back upon its haunches, with fore feet widely spread. A wild scene lay before them.

Where had so recently stood the rude but comfortable cabin of the Todds, was now only a shapeless heap of blazing brands, roaring and crackling with the eddying gusts of wind that portended the coming storm, sending up showers of sparks and flame-tinted smoke. The light illuminated the surrounding ground for a goodly distance.

It shone flickeringly upon still and motionless forms—the dead and mangled remains of both human and brute. No longer doubt as to the prime cause of this midnight conflagration.

No accident had wrought out this work of destruction.

The Indians; little need to hesitate in the conclusion. They had made a bold dash—had dealt a deadly blow, and then had vanished with the cunning celerity which forms such a prominent characteristic of the outlawed race.

Only for a moment did Ambrose Wraxall hesitate; his fiery eyes took in the entire scene at a glance. Then with a howling cry that seemed wrenched from his very heart, he dashed his heels furiously into the sides of his reeking horse, and darted forward, pausing close beside the human corpses.

There were two; those of a man and woman. One glance told the keen-eyed horseman who they had been.

Though the clothing was charred and blood-stained, though the firelight flashed with a lurid glow upon the mutilated, gore-stained head, Ambrose knew full well that he was gazing upon the remains of Ezra Todd, and his wife, Sarah.

His eyes dwelt upon the revolting sight like those of one fascinated against his own will. Twice did he glance aside, but with a furtive look, as though dreading the discovery of a yet more trying sight.

Such was indeed the case. He feared lest he should behold the mangled corpse of her whom

he loved above all else earthly; that of sweet Ellen Todd.

But this was only momentary. Then he sprung to the ground, and strode swiftly around the blazing heap, unheeding the searing heat that scorched his garments and reddened the flesh.

His eyes scanned every inch of the ground, and his heart seemed filled with conflicting emotions of hope and fear. He was searching for what would have well-nigh killed him to find—the dead body of the maiden.

Upon every hand were evidences of wanton cruelty and brutality, in the bodies of ruthlessly slaughtered stock, that lay as they had fallen beneath the death-dealing bullet or arrow of the red-men.

Wraxall had completed his circuit of the blazing cabin, when his well-trained ear caught a suspicious sound; doubly so now, as he saw before him such plain evidence of the savage foe being again upon the war-path. The sounds of a rapidly approaching footfall—unmistakably that of a human being—came to his hearing, and with a rapid bound he gained and sunk down beside the lifeless body of a horse, that lay not far from the ruins of the log stable.

At almost the same instant, Ambrose observed the figure of a man burst forth from the woods, and dash recklessly toward the fire. A peculiar expression flitted athwart Wraxall's bronzed features, as he recognized in the slender figure that of Anthony Ingo, his successful rival.

A wild cry broke from the lips of the newcomer, as the dread scene in all its fearful details met his gaze, and then a movement of the black horse attracted his attention. That he recognized it, was plain; only one man upon the Illinois border possessed a horse like that.

"Wraxall—Ambrose Wraxall!" he cried, and his voice rose almost to a shriek, so intense were his emotions.

"Well, sir, here I am. What's your will?" composedly replied the huge borderer, as he uprose from his place of concealment, and advanced toward the youth.

"What does this mean? Where is Ellen? Tell me, or I'll tear the answer from your black heart!" screamed Ingo, as he half raised his rifle and sprung forward.

A grim smile, flitted athwart the visage of the giant, at these words, but then a stern look settled in its place. He lifted a hand with open palm, and waved the distracted lover back.

"Are ye crazy, Tony Ingo, that ye speak such words to me? If I did not think so, by my father's bones! I would lay ye across my knees and use the sole of my moccasin as deftly as ever did your mother, in your younger days? What is your meaning? What is it you accuse me of?" half-contemptuously replied the huge borderer.

"You ask? What are you doing here? Who murdered *them*? Where is Nell—*my* Nell? You have stolen her away, because she could not love you. Tell me where you have hidden her; or is she—? My God! no, she is not dead! That would be too horrible! Ah!"

The wild words of the young man ceased in a hoarse, inarticulate groan, and his figure reeled, while a hand clutched spasmodically at his throat, as though he was suffocating.

Ambrose Wraxall sprung forward and clasped the sinking figure in his arms, but the contact seemed to revive the stricken man. A fierce curse broke from his lips as he tore himself loose, and his eyes glared with the fires of insanity.

His features became frightfully distorted, and a froth fringed his lips, as his small sinewy hands twined around the brawny neck of the borderer. A shrill, snarling cry hissed from between his grating teeth, as his steel-like muscles stiffened, and the long slender fingers buried themselves deep in the throat of Ambrose.

So sudden and unexpected had been this assault, that Wraxall reeled before it.

But then his huge hands clasped the slight waist of the frantic youth, and raised him bodily from the ground. Still the vise-like fingers gripped the bronzed throat, though Ingo was raised to a level with Wraxall's head.

Then the giant exerted his strength to its utmost, and cast his fierce assailant from him. Ingo fell to the ground with crushing force, half a score yards distant, his form quivering from the shock.

Wraxall staggered forward and sunk to his knees, sick and faint. The steel-like fingers seemed to have torn out his entire throat; the blood trickled from the long wounds, where the skin had been removed.

This last act of the strange struggle had been witnessed by a man; one of the nearest neighbors who had been attracted to the spot by the lurid glare of the blazing cabin. With a loud cry he sprung forward and interposed his form between the rival lovers.

"What d'y' mean, 'Brose Wraxall? What has the boy done to you, that you should treat him that-a-way?" he sternly cried, as the borderer staggered to his feet.

"Hawkins—you here?" he muttered, as one hand mechanically fingered his lacerated throat.

"Yes. I knowed thar was deviltry afoot, soon's I see'd the light; but I didn't look fer this. Ain't thar a-plenty o' red-skins, 'thout our fightin' 'mongst ourselves, man?"

"Blame *him*, not me, Hawkins. He flew at me like a wild-cat, and if I handled him a little roughly, 'twas only to save my own wind. See! my throat—would ye believe the boy had such strength? By the bones of my father! I began to think my time for taking up the long trail had come, then!" grimly replied Wraxall.

"Pore boy! He didn't know what he was a-doin', I reckon," muttered the settler, bending over the motionless figure. "The sight must 'a' driv' him plum crazy. No wonder, nyther; Nell an' him had agreed to pull in harness together—as mayhap ye know?"

"Yes—I know," hoarsely answered Ambrose.

The strange, unnatural tone startled the settler, and he glanced quickly up at the other's face. The expression of despairing woe there, awed him. His lips parted as if to speak; but then with a silent shake of his head, he turned away.

"How is the boy—not hurt bad, is he, Hawkins?"

"No—I don't guess so. Stunded, I reckon, No wonder—'twas a awful fall you gi' him, 'Brose. You tossed him away like a sheaf o' wheat!"

"'Twas time, too," grimly replied the borderer. "But to work. Let him alone—he'll get up all right, shortly. We must hunt for sign, while we can."

"For sign—ain't they all—?" but the word stuck in Hawkins's throat.

"No—I think not; I can only find the old folks. But even if so, we must follow the red-skins and teach them a lesson. It's Old Pecan's doings, I think."

"You think *she's* got tuck off?"

"I've looked all round, but can't find any thing of her—Nell, I mean. The old folks are gone."

The words of the giant borderer came low and calmly, but there was a depth of woeful agony in the tones that told the rough settler how fearfully this blow had stricken him.

"It's mighty onfortunate, this storm which is comin', jest now. It cain't hold off much longer, an' then whar'll be the trail? A bad job! Ah's me!" muttered Hawkins, as the two men questioned the ground, aided in their search by the still bright glow of the ruins.

"It will delay us—that's all. I've followed a blind trail before now, when I hadn't the half to work for that this gives me. I may be too late to save her—Old Pecan is a very devil—but not to *avenge* her. This shall be an ill night's work for them, in the end. The old folks were my friends, and I loved them as I would my own kin, were there any of them left me. I swear the DEATH-HUNT for this," sternly uttered Wraxall, as he procured a blazing brand to aid him in his search.

"An' Jabe Hawkins is with ye, 'Brose, so fur as a man kin go who hes a wife an' fambly o' his own to keer fur. But—hist! That's somebody a-comin'!"

"It's one of the neighbors. None but a friend would walk so careless," quietly remarked Wraxall, still scanning the trampled ground.

"It's Nathe Cole—see."

"Go and tell him what's up. Don't let him come this way until I can make out the trail. See what you can do for Tony—I'm afraid I hurt the boy."

Wraxall turned an anxious glance skyward, then bent once more to his task, well knowing that little time was left him in which to discover who were the true authors of this daring outrage. The storm that had been threatening since sunset, now seemed ready to wreak its fury, the more turbulent from being so long withheld.

The tall borderer only wished to ascertain one thing: the rest he already knew. He desired to learn whether Ellen Todd had been carried away captive or not.

He had already expressed his belief as to who had conducted the attack: Old Pecan. This was a celebrated war-chief of the Kickapoos, who had long been a scourge to the scattered settlements along the border, and who, while displaying the most reckless daring and audacity, was rarely gifted with prudence and foresight. As a partisan leader, he ranked among the most feared enemies the whites had.

Some years previously, during an expedition of the borderers under the Whitesides, after some stolen stock that the Kickapoos had lifted,

the favorite son of Old Pecan, who was already looked upon by the tribe as the one most fitting to rule them on the demise of their aged chief, was killed. And from that day, though before considered a firm friend to the pale-faces, he became a very demon in seeking revenge.

The sullen rumbling of distant thunder now broke the air, and occasional drops of rain fell, greatly to the disgust of the trail-hunter, whose search had as yet been unrewarded by the desired discovery. The neighbors had gathered, one by one, until half a score stood around the dying fire, but Wraxall had ordered them back, as they proffered their assistance.

He was slowly skirting the clearing, with torch held low to the ground, his eyes striving keenly to detect some trace indicating the passage of those whom he sought, when suddenly a triumphant shout broke from his lips. A brief pause as if to assure himself that there was no mistake; then arising he uttered a loud cry of joyful import, that told the assembled neighbors their worst fears were unfounded—that Ellen Todd had left the clearing *alive*, though as evidently a captive in the hands of a ruthless foe. But still while there remained life, there was hope.

"Praise the good Lord, boys—she's alive!" shouted Ambrose, swinging the torch wildly around his head.

With a wavering cry, Tony Ingo sprung to his feet and rushed to the spot, falling upon his knees and greedily scanning the clearly defined footprints that so plainly told the joyous tidings. Wraxall stood by, holding the torch, gloomily watching him.

At length Tony arose and gazed full into the face of the huge borderer. As his hand was outstretched his voice trembled:

"Ambrose, will you forgive me? I was mad to say what I did—but God help me!—I believed then that you had murdered them for revenge, because—"

"Don't be squeamish about speaking out your mind, lad," replied Wraxall, though with an evident struggle. "They all know I was in love with Nell, and that she chose you before me. But I'm sorry you thought so mean of me. Perhaps I misjudged you, too, for I took ye for a milk-an'-water sort o' body, without much sand in your craw. But if you serve the red-skins as good a taste as you gave me, out yonder, I'll have to look well to my sights, or you'll carry off the first prize, yet," laughed Ambrose, as he tenderly handled his lacerated throat.

"You've found the trail—what next?"

"See!" uttered the borderer, in a gloomy tone, "there comes your answer."

The thunder broke in an awful peal, and then the flood-gates of heaven seemed lifted, the rain falling in perfect sheets, drenching to the skin in a moment all those who were exposed to its power. The settlers exchanged glances, gloomy and full of dejection, but did not utter their thoughts aloud.

They knew only too well what the consequences of this rain would be. By daylight, not the faintest sign of a trail would remain to guide them; not one absolute clew left as to the perpetrators of this bloody deed.

"Come on! Follow me, if ye are men!"

cried Tony Ingo, wildly, as he sprung forward a pace, and then pausing, beckoned to the settlers. "Come on—will you let a woman cry for help, and ye not lift a hand to help her? Shanie on ye—cowards!"

"Never mind the boy—he don't know what he says, men. This blow has well-nigh unsettled his brain," calmly added Wraxall.

"Ye call yourselves men, and yet stand there, idle, doing nothing, while she is being carried off to worse than death? Ambrose Wraxall, because you could not win her, you begrudge others better fortune! But I'll disappoint ye—I'll find her myself, alone and unaided! Go! give your women the weapons ye are afraid to handle. Go! the despised boy will put ye all to shame," cried Ingo, his metallic voice rising almost to a shriek, as he waved his rifle toward the little group, and then bounded away into the forest depths.

"The critter's gone plum crazy," muttered Hawkins, with a significant shrug of the shoulders. "A cat couldn't see sharp enough to follow a trail in *sech* weather. He'll tucker himself plum out afore day—see if he don't."

"Let him go—a tramp through this storm will cool his blood and do him good. If he can do no good, he can do no harm, anyhow. But come—there's work for us all yet before day-dawn."

"Work?"

"Yes; see!" and the gigantic borderer pointed toward the lifeless bodies of man and wife. "They have done many of us a kind service and act in life. There is one way we can repay them now; they only need one service at our hands. We will give them a decent burial. The rain 'll not hurt us; we're neither sugar nor salt. Besides, it'll make the ground softer to work in," and Wraxall ended with a strange, hard laugh that grated disagreeably on the hearing of the settlers.

"Don't talk that-a-way, 'Brose," remonstrated Cole, who followed the scout toward the dead. "It makes me trimble to hear ye."

"It's wrong, I know, Nathe, but I can't help it. There's something here," and the borderer smote his own chest a sounding blow, "that smothers me. I *must* say somethin', and if I speak as I feel, I'd break down and make a calf of myself. I tell you, man, I loved these people, as I might have loved my own folks, had the cursed Indians left any of my flesh and blood living. They treated me as though I was their own son. They saved me from being a perfect brute. Only for them, I believe I should have become a perfect savage, with only one purpose in life—that of killing Indians. I loved them and her—Nell, I mean— But where's the use in my talking? They're gone, and Nell—if I ever get her back from those red devils, it will only be to lose her again. She loves that boy—Tony. I wish him no ill, but it'll be a black day for poor Nell that she stands up before the preacher with *him*," gloomily added Wraxall, standing gazing down upon the motionless forms of those who in life had been so kind to him.

"Ef you git her back—*kin* you, 'Brose? *Kin* you do it?—that's what bothers me. How'll ye work it? Thar's nothin' to show who did it—

whether Kickapoos, Miamis, Sauks, or other devils."

"Can I? By the bones of my father! I *will* do it! Dead or alive, she comes back here—I swear it! It may be a long and trying hunt—I fear me it *will* be—but every trail has two ends, and I'll rest not until I join these. 'Brose Wraxall swears it—and who can say he ever broke his pledge, whether given to man or woman, red-skin or pale-face?"

"Time is passing, neighbors, and our work is not completed yet," quietly remarked a settler of more prepossessing address than the generality of the settlers. "Our families will be anxious at our long stay, and fear the worst."

"True, friend. To work, then. Here, beneath this oak will do. The fire has left its mark upon it, too, but 'twill leave out again, and make a fitting monument for two such true and faithful-hearted pioneers. Ah's me! a sad task is this!" and the stalwart borderer dashed a tear from his eye.

It was a weird, impressive tableau thus formed. The ruins of the cabin and stable still sending up a few forked tongues of flame, lighting the scene but faintly. The rain pouring down in an unbroken sheet; the thunder rolling in sullen reverberations; the still and ghostly forms of the ruthlessly murdered persons; the kneeling figures of those hardy men, hastily scooping out a shallow grave beneath the wide-spreading boughs of the scorched and shriveled tree.

And thus the two corpses were gently placed in their last resting-place, and the loose dirt pushed back over them. Once more a stalwart settler knelt beside the long mound, his companions standing around him, with bowed and uncovered heads, unheeding the furious dashings of the howling tempest; and then he breathed out a rude and uncouthly-worded, but fervent and heartfelt prayer, that at least possessed the merit of sincerity.

Then they separated and proceeded toward their several homes, with an understanding where to meet with the first rays of day-dawn, to concert their further action regarding their captive friend.

Ambrose Wraxall remained beside the grave of those whom he had loved so tenderly in life, and whose murder he had sworn to bitterly avenge.

CHAPTER III.

MANATHE.

A CLEAR but oppressively sultry day in early summer. The vast forest is undisturbed by a breath of air; the very leaves seem to wilt and droop beneath the scorching rays of the sun, that, though far down toward the western horizon, seems to have lost none of its noonday power.

Two men are sitting side by side upon a moss-covered log, beneath the wide-spreading boughs of a forest monarch—two men of different races, yet between whom there appears to be amity and perfect understanding. An Indian and a pale-face.

"It will be a hard job, chief," spoke the latter, thoughtfully, using a dialect of the Kicka-

poo tribe. "He is a great brave, and knows well how to strike a heavy blow, when he sees a foe before him."

"Hooh! If the White Crow is *afraid*, we will drop the matter. A chief's daughter is not to be won while a brave sleeps. There are many young warriors who would gladly do what I ask, if they knew the reward," replied the savage, with a slightly contemptuous air.

"Afraid! White Crow does not understand. The chief talks in his sleep," haughtily retorted the pale-face, with a malignant glance at the half-averted face of the other.

Had the chief noted that look, he might well have hesitated, it was so full of dire vindictiveness. But ere the Indian raised his head, the expression was gone, and in its stead came a look of stolid indifference.

The chief was a magnificent specimen of his race; one such as was more frequently seen in the past than in the present day. Tall and muscular, with broad shoulders, long arms and body, compact and round, thickly set with knots and folds of iron-like muscle. His body was bare from the waist upward, and on the bronzed skin could be traced more than one deep scar, that told he had often faced his foeman in deadly strife.

The man beside him was short, but of an unusually broad and heavy build; though this was evidently good muscle and brawn, and his form gave one an idea of surprising activity and suppleness, despite his weight.

His dress was the admixture of the savage civilized, his weapons were those usually borne by borderers; his face was repulsive, while not exactly unhandsome. But there was an evil, treacherous light in his small eyes that repelled one.

His head was covered with a matted profusion of sandy hair; the lower portion of his face with the same. His evident connection with the Kickapoo chief branded him as one of those monsters in human form—a renegade white man.

And such he was, in fact. Lad Pipe was an apostate, and one, too, of the most malignant type.

"Then the White Crow accepts?" added the chief, no less a personage than Old Pecan, himself.

"Yes—if I understand you rightly. You have an enemy whom you fear—"

"No! Old Pecan fears no man, living or dead," fiercely interrupted the chief, to the evident delight of his ally. "But," he added, "the Great Spirit has spoken against his meeting this brave. He came to the Prophet when the eyes of Kontilla were closed, and bade him warn me that when we meet, the Kickapoos would mourn the death of their chief. Look! the moon is there—you can just see it—but it will grow larger with every night. When it is round, if this Longknife, Elk-Foot, still lives to tread the war-path, then Old Pecan must die. The Manitou has said it, through Kontilla, his Prophet, and he can not lie," gloomily added the old chief.

"The word was spoken without thought, chief, and was not meant. I have seen you in battle, and where is the pale-face can stand be-

fore your arm? There is not one. But there is no words spoken about me—I can slay this great warrior, and I will, if you do as you promised."

"A Kickapoo chief knows not how to lie," tersely replied Old Pecan.

"Good! Listen and tell me if my ears heard true. I will kill this brave for you, whom you call Elk-Foot, but who is known among his people as Ambrose Wraxall, if you will give me your child, Manathe, for a squaw. Is this straight?"

"White Crow has heard well. It is as Old Pecan said."

"But you must know that Manathe does not favor me—she has been listening to black words since I was here last, and laughs at me whenever I speak to her about coming to my lodge. She has a lover already, I fear me."

"A chief's daughter looks with eyes of love only where he bids her. Manathe knows how to obey. She will enter the lodge of White Crow."

"But when?" anxiously added the renegade.

"When White Crow brings me the scalp of Elk-Foot," was the prompt reply.

"It is good. But will the chief speak these words in the ear of his child? Manathe will then have time to prepare. White Crow only waits for that; then he will take up the trail to win his squaw."

The chief arose, and with a gesture signified for the renegade to follow him. They struck rapidly through the forest for half a mile, when the Kickapoo paused, and placing one hand to his lips, gave vent to a long, peculiar cry.

They now stood upon the verge of a natural clearing, surrounded upon all sides by heavy timber, that also covered the high hills on the left. Before them stretched this level glade for over a mile in width.

Near its center stood a cluster of rudely-built huts and lodges of bark, skins and logs. It was the village of Old Pecan.

The lodges numbered nearly two hundred, for this was the town of the main tribe.

The cry echoed clearly over this glade, and was seemingly generally understood, for although a number of savages, both male and female, were to be seen moving about the lodges, none made a reply, or moved toward the spot, save one, who hastily emerged from a lodge-door. This was a woman, and, from her lightness of foot, evidently young.

In a few moments she stood before the two men, with downcast eyes. Her voice was low and musical as she spoke:

"The chief called, and Manathe is here. What does he wish of his child?"

The eyes of the renegade rested upon her face and figure with a gloating look, that told how highly he prized what the father had sold him, though conditionally. And, truly, she was one well worth a second glance, from many far more critical than Lad Pipe.

Tall, lithe and straight as an arrow, with a superbly rounded figure, that plenty of exercise had rarely matured, and which was revealed to great advantage by the peculiar garb. Her hair, secured only by a simple band of ribbon around her forehead, hung far down her shoul-

ders, black, glossy and waving, in great profusion.

Her features were clear and well cut, only slightly marked by the savage characteristics. The cheek-bones were not too prominent; the nose only slightly curved. Her eyes were large and dark, expressive and brilliant. Her curved lip and firmly-molded chin betokened a will that might break, but not bend, when once fairly set.

The presence of white blood in her veins was plainly to be observed. In truth, she was a half-breed; her mother having been captured during a marauding foray, and forced to wed with Old Pecan. She lived long enough to teach her child her own tongue, and to form her character, before ill-usage brought her to her grave. But to her child Old Pecan, usually a brutal tyrant, was ever kind and gentle.

"It is well. I would speak with my child. Are her ears open?"

A nod of the maiden's head was her reply, and then, with burning cheeks, she turned her back upon Pipe. That worthy noted this palpable evidence of dislike with a malignant smile.

"Manathe, the snows have come and gone eighteen times since the Great Spirit first gave you to me. It is time you had a lodge of your own. The squaws yonder must not laugh and say that a chief's daughter is slighted for them," pointedly added Old Pecan.

The maiden flashed a quick glance up into her father's face, but what she read there caused her eyes to droop and a shade to rest upon her countenance. She nerved herself to resist the coming trial.

"Is there any young brave upon whom your eyes have looked with favor among all the Kickapoos?"

Manathe shook her head, but was silent.

"It is well—because I have chosen for you. See! the White Crow is a great brave. His lodge-pole is dark with the scalps taken by his hand from our enemies. He is a good hunter, but he has no one to cook the meat he brings in from the chase. His lodge is empty. He has asked me for you—I have told him you should go to his lodge, as his squaw, as soon as he brings me the scalp of Elk-Foot."

"No—no! I will not! I hate him! He is a snake! His tongue is forked and his heart is black. I will never enter his lodge—never!" and Manathe stamped her foot passionately, while her dark eyes flashed with anger.

"A chief cannot lie. When White Crow comes to me and shows that he has kept his word, you shall go," quietly added the savage, as he motioned the renegade to follow him to the village.

Manathe stood gazing after them, her face still flushed hotly with angry disgust.

Old Pecan had spoken in a strangely stern tone for him to use in addressing her, and she well knew, from experience, that his mind once fairly settled, nothing short of fate could move it. She knew those were no idle words, when he declared she should enter the lodge of White Crow as his squaw.

And she was quite as determined that this should never come to pass, even did the rene-

gade bring in the scalp of the dreaded Elk-Foot. She would baffle him; if not in one way, then another.

More than one of the young braves had smiled upon her kindly, of late. She well knew her power; else she were not woman.

And then, too, White Crow had many an enemy among the Kickapoos, though prudence kept them from openly showing as much to the favorite of their great chief. Better the meanest of these braves for a master than he. If he became too importunate, a subtle stroke in the dark should free her from him forever. As the price of her hand, many would gladly deal it.

It was reflections such as these that filled the mind of the Indian maiden, as she turned and wandered aimlessly through the woods, her eyes bent at her feet, her ears unheeding the sounds around her.

The sun was already resting upon the western hilltops, and its rays cast but a gentle glow through the forest, here more open and free from undergrowth than usual. Manathe paused, and stood in thoughtful rumination.

Her senses, save those of thought, seemed sleeping, and she heard not the stealthy, panther-like footfall of the wild figure gliding toward her position. She felt not the fiery, hungry glare of the bloodshot eyes that rested upon her form; she was all unconscious of the impending peril. A peril, too, vastly greater than any that had ever before threatened her.

And then the strange, wild figure crouched low down, at only a few paces distance, with a venomous-looking knife clutched in its hand. Each nerve seemed quivering in readiness for the leap; then, like a bolt, the stranger leaped forward, uttering a fierce, snarling cry, alighting close beside the maiden, one hand clutching her long, flowing hair, bending her head forcibly backward, while the gleaming weapon hung poised over the smooth throat thus exposed, as if about to drink her heart's blood.

The maiden seemed petrified with horror and surprise at the sudden and threatening attack. Her lips parted, but no cry issued from between them. Her large eyes looked full into the glittering orbs of the stranger.

For a moment thus. The gaze of each seemed spellbound by that of the other. The eyes of the man gradually lost much of their fiery glare, and became more soft, while hers assumed a look of wondering curiosity rather than fear.

The outstretched arms slowly relaxed their tension; the knife sunk to his side, but the other begrimed hand still grasped the maiden's tresses, though with less force. Then his lips parted, and he spoke, in a harsh, unnatural voice:

"Who are you? But a moment since you were an Indian—now you look at me with *her* eyes. It is *her* hair, too! Where did you get it? You stole it from her head—you murdered her—*my* Nell! Ah!"

The last words came in a hoarse, grating snarl, and the eyes once more burned with insane fury, while the glittering knife was raised above the maiden's breast.

But Manathe did not shriek. A strange courage seemed to inspire her, and, as she spoke, her voice was low and clear, unfaltering in its accents.

"No—I did not kill her. My hands are free from blood. I am a woman. Your eyes are blinded, and you do not see straight."

"You speak plain, but you look like an Indian. Why do you paint your face like that, then? It's red—like blood!"

"My mother was a pale-face, like you," replied Manathe, gently, yet with a furtive glance around her, as if in search of help.

"Then you are a friend? You hate the savages?"

"Do you hate them? Have they ever done you any harm?"

"Harm?" and the man uttered a wild, chilling laugh. "Harm, you ask? My God! have they not? They murdered them, and stole *her* from me—my Nell, who had promised to be my wife. Stole her away from me; and now men say I am crazy—ha! ha! It is *they* who are mad—not I. I laugh at the fools; but sometimes my brain is sick and faint. That is when I hunt all day—all night, hunt such a long, weary time, for my lost love—for my Nell, and cannot find her. Then my head dances and whirls and rings, until it nearly bursts. But I am not crazy—no, not crazy," and the voice died away in a low muttering, while his hand dropped from the maiden's hair.

Manathe gave one wild leap away, and then turning, fled like a frightened fawn toward the village. But with another harsh, grating snarl of rage, the maniac bounded after her, and ere she had traversed a score of yards, his strong hand shut down upon her shoulder.

"Ah-ha! you, too, fear me—you, too, think I am mad," he hissed, as with resistless force he turned the maiden's face toward him. "You fear I will find her—my Nell—and you run to whisper black words in her ear, so that she may hide in fear and trembling when I come near her. But you shall not—I will kill you first! See! this knife is long and sharp. I pressed it to my lips, and swore an oath that it should be reddened with the life-blood of an Indian for every hair in *her* head. You are the first I have found since that awful night—I will kill you now!"

Manathe saw that her life was in frightful peril.

But her presence of mind did not desert her in this trying moment. A bold *ruse* flashed upon her mind. Might she not impose upon this insane being? At the thought, a bright light burned from her dark eyes, and a smile came to her lips, even as the maniac rudely forced her back to the ground, his fingers wound in her long hair, the knife glittering above her form.

"Kill me, and you will never find her; let me go, and I will speedily bring your Nell to you," she said, in a low, soft voice.

The maniac started, but did not relax his hold. Then a cunning light chased the fiery glow from his eyes, and he slowly moved the knife until it was hid behind his person.

There was a horrible subtleness in this action, that nearly overpowered the will of the maiden. But there was a faint hope that her *ruse* would yet succeed, and she slowly rose erect, her limbs nerved to flee, in case he should make another attempt upon her life.

"You are lying to me—I can see it in your eyes."

"No, I am not lying. Why should I? You are my friend. You say the Indians stole her—I know they did. But don't tell them I said so, or they would kill me. The great chief of the Kickapoos, Old Pecan—"

"Ha! that's it! That's what I tried to remember, until my brain grew dizzy and turned sick. That's the name—he stole her—my poor, poor Nell!"

"Yes, I know it. He stole her and brought her to his village. She is there now. He means to make her his squaw."

"His squaw—my Nell? And he an Indian? Ah-ha! I'll have his life for that! I swear it!" snarled the maniac.

"Yes, but we will blind his eyes—you and I. We will steal her away, and then you can go back to your own people, and live happily with her."

"You will help me—you can do this? Oh, for God's sake, don't deceive me now! It would kill me! You will give me back my poor Nell?"

The voice of the poor maniac changed remarkably with these words. It was low, trembling and imploring. Great tears stood in his blood-shot eyes, and Manathe felt a choking sensation in her own throat as she gazed upon him.

But she was still upon her guard. She had seen how rapidly he had passed from one extreme to the other, and dreaded lest his madness should yet fail her.

"Yes, I will help you. Come with me, and I will take you to her. She is only a little distance away, and is waiting for you. She sent me here to meet you."

"Then she isn't dead? They lied when they told me that?" eagerly added the maniac.

"Yes, they lied to you. Come, we must hurry, or she will tire of waiting for you."

"Hurry then—quick—faster!" he muttered, as he grasped her arm to hasten her steps.

Manathe gently released her arm, and glided on in advance, heading directly for the Indian village. She thought now only of her own escape, and felt no compunction at thus leading the pale-face into a snare.

"Is it far? She is there, waiting for me?" muttered the maniac, doubtfully.

"Yes; we are nearly there. But see—you will frighten her with that gun. She will run and hide where you can not find her. If she sees it, for Old Pecan said you were hunting her, to take her life. Better hide it here; you can get it again as you come back," tremblingly persuaded the Indian maiden.

Her wild companion gazed fixedly into her eyes for a moment, but she met the scrutiny unflinchingly; and then without a word, he dropped the rifle at the foot of a tree, once more following her lead.

In a few moments more they neared the edge of the clearing in which stood the Indian village, when Manathe paused and uttered:

"I promised to cry out and tell her if I found you. She can hear me from here, and will come out to meet you. Shall I do so?"

"Yes—yes, obey Nell. Bring her to me," eagerly cried the maniac.

Manathe raised her voice and uttered a loud,

shrill cry—the cry of warning, telling of a foe's approach. The maniac glared at her with a startled air; then as if the truth had flashed upon his shattered mind, and he saw how bitterly he had been deceived, he drew his knife and sprung toward his treacherous guide, with a howl of ferocious rage.

But Manathe was prepared, and knowing that she must die if ever he laid hands upon her now, she darted forward into the open ground, with the speed of a startled deer, uttering scream after scream. And close behind her bounded the madman.

The first cry had alarmed the village, and now the warriors, hastily arming, flocked from the clustering lodges. They beheld the pursued maiden, and started toward her, with shrill yells of anger.

The maniac momentarily paused, at this sight. But then, as he recognized the approaching figures for Indians, a horrible cry burst from his lips and he brandished his knife with fiendish glee.

The braves separated to allow Manathe to go by, then closed again; but as they caught sight of the madman's face, they paused. They knew that one whose brain had been touched by the searing fingers of their Great Spirit was before them.

The madman sprung fiercely upon the foremost, striking and thrusting venomously with the long, heavy knife, uttering snarling cries, like some enraged wild beast. But only for a moment; then the mass closed upon him, and bore him to the ground.

A brief but fierce and deadly struggle ensued. Then it was over, and the red-men arose, victorious. But several of their number lay around, still in death, or writhing and moaning in their agony, beside the silent figure of the maniac.

CHAPTER IV.

IN CAPTIVITY.

A RETROSPECTIVE glance becomes necessary at this point, back to the night of the tragedy that had caused such commotion among the actors in this tale.

The night, it will be remembered, was dark and threatening a storm. Ezra Todd having seen the stock safely sheltered, the ill-fated family retired to enjoy a sleep earned by a hard day's toil.

But their repose was doomed to a fearful awaking. The winds howled wildly through the wide-boughed oak tree, whose creaking effectually drowned the slight noise made by the dusky-skinned marauders as they prepared for a surprise.

They had brought with them from the woods a stout sapling, and now paused with it in their arms, its square butt threatening the door of the settler's cabin. No words were spoken; each man knew what duty lay before him.

Then the heavy log was hurled against the ponderous door, with all the power of a score of strong arms. Like the tramp of doom, it awakened the settlers from their sleep of fancied security.

Once more, and then the shattered door was

burst from its hinges, and flung across the room. Then came the shrill yells of exultation, as the dusky assailants dashed into the cabin.

The women, thus terribly awakened, shrieked aloud in horror, and Ezra Todd, in half-sleeping confusion, sprung toward his weapons. But strong hands seized upon the pale-faces and bore them out into the open air.

Surrounded by dusky fiends, the two women stood clasped in each other's arms, clad only in their flowing night-ropes. But only for a moment was this; then a man approached them, and tossing Ellen some garments, ordered her to don them.

The hopes that were aroused by this action were soon rudely dispelled. A bright flame began to flicker through the open doorway, and then, at a signal from their leader—the same who had furnished Ellen with the clothes—the blows were dealt that rendered the maiden an orphan.

A wild shriek broke from her pallid lips, and, tottering, Ellen would have fallen only for the supporting arms of the renegade. Her senses fled, and she lay like one dead.

It was broad day when she again awoke to consciousness. And then she gazed around her, with a sadly bewildered and apprehensive look.

At first her eyes rested only upon the dark green foliage of trees overhead, through which the sunlight was brightly streaming. By these, too, she knew that she was in motion, though she appeared to be resting upon a leafy couch.

Ellen raised her head and gazed around, with a dim sense of terror, for as yet the dread past was fast locked in temporary oblivion. But then, as she noted the grim, dusky figures of half a score savages, painted and plumed in fantastic bravery, the truth flashed upon her, and a low, gasping cry broke from her lips as her head sunk back once more.

"Hello, my dear," uttered an unpleasant voice as a man glided up beside the rude litter upon which Ellen was resting. "Come to, hes ye? Thought you was goin' to make a die of it, you was so long. Now don't be afeard—we won't hurt ye."

"Who are you? Where are you taking me to?" murmured Ellen, a ray of hope springing up in her heart at the sound of a friendly voice.

But then her spirits sunk as she met the gaze of the speaker. Besides being equipped and decorated like the others, there was an evil glow of covetous admiration in his small eyes, that bade her hope but little from him in the way of mercy or pity.

"That's it—woman all over," he chuckled, resting one hand upon the litter, as its dusky bearers glided steadily along. "Axin' questions jest's soon's they kin wag their tongues. Hows'ever, I'm willin' to tell ye all I know, ef 'twill please ye any. You axed who was I?"

"Yes—and why have you done this cruel deed? My poor mother and father—dead—dead!" moaned Ellen, weeping bitterly.

"Now look here—what's the use?" impatiently muttered the renegade. "They're gone—'twon't bring 'em back fer you to take on so. They was old and wored out, anyhow. They're better off, I reckon, as it is. 'Sides, the Injuns don't like to see a captive snivelin'—they most gen'ally

stops it 'ith a tomahawk stroke," he added, significantly.

Ellen, in sore dread of her captors, choked back her emotions as best she could.

"You axed who was I. Wal, I'm a white man by color, an' a red-man by ch'ice. I s'pose you would call me a runnygade, ef you was to speak out plain. But thet don't matter much—it's on'y a word, anyhow. Mebbe you've heerd o' me though—Lad Pipe? The Injuns call me White Crow," complacently added the renegade.

Ellen shuddered. She *had* heard of him. The name was almost as deeply infamous in border annals as those of the Girty brothers.

Pipe chuckled as he noted the effect of his communication. He evidently took pride in his celebrity.

"Now fer the why I am kerryin' you off. I s'pect you'll thank me when I tell you. 'D orter, anyhow. 'Tain't every gal 't I'd take so much trouble fer, jest to git her a husband."

Ellen uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Jest so—knowed you'd be glad," maliciously continued the renegade. "But don't be *too* glad. 'Tain't me I mean. You ain't so lucky as thet. I'm spoken fur, a'ready. Sorry fer ye, I am so, but it cain't be helped now. No; it's fer another feller. One o' us, too, though he makes b'lieve he's a inemy to all red critters. A runnygade on the sly, ye see. Sorter plays into our hands when the show's good fer us. Why don't ye ax who he is?" rattled Lad Pipe.

"I don't—no one that I know," faltered Ellen, trembling.

"But it is—you know him, well. He says you give him the sack, not long ago. Think ag'in," persisted Pipe.

"Not—no! it cannot be he!"

"Who?"

"Ambrose Wraxall?"

"Good guesser you be," chuckled Pipe. "Hit it fu'st pop! Yas, it's him. Elk-Foot we call him. He's one o' us. He kem to me, an' offered me big pay ef I'd do the job up in good style."

"I don't believe it—I believe you *lie*!" cried Ellen, with far more energy than she had before displayed. "He is not that kind of a person. He is honest—a friend to his kind, and not a cowardly renegade. You are telling mere falsehoods, for some reason of your own."

Lad Pipe laughed heartily, without a shade of anger at this plain language.

"Spunky, ain't ye? Wal, I'm glad of it, fer I tell ye true, you'll need it all. Elk-Foot kerries things 'th a mighty high hand, sometimes, 'th his squaws. He said you'd be apt to cut up nasty, fer awhile, but thet he'd soon break ye in. Will, too—bet ye!"

Ellen made no reply. Her thoughts were busy trying to pierce through the toils that seemed closing around her.

There was much in the renegade's statement that seemed plausible, but still she could not believe that Ambrose Wraxall was the demon painted. She had esteemed him very highly, and in common with others, looked upon him as a sort of guardian angel to the settlements.

She knew that he was often absent from home, and that more than one dark rumor was whispered in connection with his name; but these rumors were of fierce, almost fiendish, revenge

upon the red-skins. The longer she reflected, the firmer became Ellen's belief that Lad Pipe had been lying to her, for some covert purpose.

"You seem mighty busy thinkin'—tell a feller what it's all about?" he asked, curiously, after a long silence.

"Of what you told me," replied the maiden, gazing keenly into his face; but he bore the scrutiny unmoved.

"Wal?"

"I believe, as I said before, that you are telling me falsely. I don't believe that Ambrose Wraxall had anything to do with this—this murder."

"All right. Think that-a-way, ef you will. It don't make no differ' to me. You'll find it out soon enough, anyhow; a week at funderest," coolly and indifferently added the renegade.

"Where are you taking me to?"

"We're 'most there, now. It's a small hole in the hill—a cave, like, not fur from the river. We'll leave you thar ontel he chooses to come fer ye. No," he added, as Ellen's eyes glowed with a wild hope, "don't think it. I'll leave a guard thar to watch ye, an' see that the wrong feller don't git ye. 'Twon't do to lose my pay now, jest fer a leetle keerlessness, ye see."

Ellen dropped her head and relapsed into silence.

The little party glided along at a fair pace, and now in perfect silence, save the rustling of their moccasined feet. Lad Pipe made no further attempt to convince his charge of the truth of his story, but strode along at the head of his braves.

In less than half an hour the party abruptly paused, and Lad Pipe disappeared amidst the thickly-growing bushes. He returned in a few moments, and motioned for Ellen to alight and follow him.

Knowing the folly of resistance, Ellen obeyed, and then Pipe led her to a small but comfortable cave, situated near the crest of a hill, overlooking one of the confluent of the Illinois River. Pipe turned toward Ellen with a malicious grin.

"Here's your home, fer the present. We'll fix it up a leetle more comf'table an' then 'll travel."

By his directions, several of the savages busied themselves with gathering grass and leaves, which were deposited in a corner of the cave, to answer the purpose of a couch. Meantime Pipe spoke to two of his followers in a low, guarded tone:

"You must keep good watch and not lose sight of her until the white chief comes. You must never both sleep at once, and see that the pale squaw does not deceive you and escape. If she should do so, you will get nothing for your trouble. But if she is safe when the white chief comes, you shall have each a gun and blankets and as much rum as you can drink in a whole moon!"

Ellen curiously inspected her future prison. It was small, but dry and airy. The floor was covered with sand, and the walls, roof and sides were of jagged rock. The entrance was small, barely large enough to admit the passage of a human form in a stooping posture. In front and over the cave grew numerous bushes that concealed it, unless almost stumbled upon.

The river could be seen, by peering through the leafy screen, and although the hill descended abruptly, yet it could be scaled on the river side by an active and sure-footed man. The other slopes were gradual. Altogether, it was a wild and picturesque spot.

The savages ate a hearty lunch, and then Pipe renewed his instructions to the two guards, that they might know how to receive the "white chief," when he came to claim his bride. Then, with a mocking adieu to Ellen, Lad Pipe turned away, and, followed by his dusky braves, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER V.

A DARING PLAN.

CASUAL mention has been made of the hills that reared their tree-crowned heights far above the forest level to the left or southeast of the Kickapoo village. To one of these heights, then, turn we now our attention.

The maiden's cry, that had alarmed the villagers, and caused them to flock forth from the dingy lodges, saluted the hearing of others than they. It rung piercingly through the forest, and over the hills and far away.

A leafy bush upon the hill's crest quivered slightly as though stirred by a sudden gust of wind; then was still once more. But from a minute aperture peered forth a pair of keen eyes, eagerly drinking in the details of the thrilling scene below.

These eyes noted the fleeing maiden, closely pursued by the howling maniac, and then, though the distance was considerable, the bush once more quivered, as though the scene was one possessing a peculiar interest. And still the eyes peered down with eager keenness.

The attack—the brief but frightful struggle, where one man was battling single-handed against a host, dealing death or gaping wounds at every blow of his blood-stained weapon—the blow—the fall—the rising and shrinking back of the red-skins: all these details did the glowing eyes drink in.

Then one savage—fantastically arrayed in a garb that denoted his rank as a Medicine-man—approached and stooped over the prostrate figure of the madman. A moment thus, when he arose and motioned with one hand toward the village.

Several braves picked up the silent figure, and, surrounded by their comrades, slowly entered the town. And the glittering eyes noted their course as they wound through the crooked streets, until the crowd paused beside a peculiarly-constructed lodge.

In a few moments the crowd slowly dispersed, here and you, some carrying in their slain comrades.

Then the eyes drew back from the loophole, the bush rustled slightly, and a tall form uprose from the leafy covert. It was a form that once seen would not be forgotten, that of a white man. The form of Ambrose Wraxall—of "Elk-Foot."

The borderer glided cautiously along for a few paces, and notwithstanding his heavy weight the deftly-planted moccasined feet scarce left an imprint upon the greensward. He paused beneath a huge, wide-spreading tree, and then

grasping a low hanging limb dextrously swung himself upon it. The borderer deftly worked his way to a position near the center of the foliage, where, while snugly concealed from view of any passers-by below, he could command a tolerably fair view of the Kickapoo village.

That he intended remaining thus for some little time was evident from the care he displayed in selecting a comfortable seat. Then, while his keen eye closely watched the village, his tongue gave utterance to the thoughts that filled his mind, though apparently he was ignorant of speaking above his breath.

"A nice muddle it's getting to be, I *don't* think!" were the first coherent words that issued from his lips. "As though it wasn't enough for *her* to be in their hands, without *his* getting there too. For it must be Tony—though I had only a glimpse of his face. None but a crazy devil would have acted so; and he was crazy—crazy as a loon! How did he get away from them, I wonder?"

The reader may remember that Tony Ingo, the lately accepted lover of Ellen Todd, had dashed away in the midnight gloom, after his brief struggle with Wraxall beside the blazing cabin, in a frenzy of agonized fear for the safety of his loved one. He had always been looked upon as a rather "flighty and high-strung boy," and the dread events of that night had seemingly shattered his mind irrevocably.

He was found, a raving maniac, by a party of settlers who were returning from a fruitless search for the abducted maiden, and carried to his own home. But with the cunning possessed by the mad, he had eluded his watchers, and again departed in quest of his Ellen.

With his wanderings we have nothing to do, until the time when he met Manathe, the Indian maiden, in the forest. And knowing that his one-time rival was mad, Ambrose Wraxall had no difficulty in accounting for the scene he had just witnessed.

And now, as the tall borderer crouched there in the tree-top, gazing down upon the village where his successful rival was held a prisoner—for he knew that, if dead, Ingo would never have been carried in such a manner to the lodge—his countenance flushed hotly, then became ghastly pale. He started and glanced quickly around him, while the massive form quivered like a storm-tossed shrub.

But it was not with bodily fear. He did not fear personal danger. That alone would never have caused this abrupt change.

A terrible temptation was assailing him. A fierce and desperate struggle was going on within his heart, and the havoc it made was legibly imprinted upon his features.

"How can I help it? If he is fool enough to run his head into a noose, am I obliged to risk my life to get him out? Besides, I have other work—I have *her* to work for. She is more to me—even while she cast my love aside—than he is. And then if—if he should die, might not I—"

The face of the giant borderer flushed hotly, and his eye glistened with a fiery light, as he peered down upon the Indian village. His voice came in a husky whisper, and he knew not that he spoke.

"If he was gone, Nell would turn to me, as she did before he came. She loved me then—or 'twould have grown to that, only for his girlish face. He is no fit mate at the best for my Nell. She should love a man—a man able to protect her, and love her as she deserves. What is he that she should choose him before me?" and a proud smile curled the lips of the borderer.

"But is she there?" he added, after a brief silence. "She *must* be there—where else? And if so, she will soon learn that he is a captive also. They'll not kill him—I don't think so, anyhow. They must know he is crazy. If I free her—and I have sworn to do it, by the bones of my dead—she will ask for her lover. What can I say? That I left him to be murdered? No! thus far in life Ambrose Wraxall has acted as a man, and it is too late now to take up a new trail. I'll do my best, let what will come of it. I'll save the boy, if one man can do it. But how—how?" muttered the borderer, his eyes glowing steadily with a light that rendered them rarely handsome.

As the hours rolled on, he sat there motionless, searching his brain for some plan that would promise a hope of success.

And thus, as the day passed on and the sun slowly sunk toward the western horizon, the borderer remained perched upon the gnarled limb, his gaze steadily fixed upon the Indian village that lay before him, his form as still and motionless as the huge, twisted boughs of oak that surrounded him. His mind was occupied in shaping the details of a bold plan, by which he hoped to gain his double object.

Then a long-drawn breath and a settling back of his frame to an easier position, together with the glow that lighted up his face, told that Ambrose had decided upon his course of action.

One by one the stars came out, though shining but faintly through the hazy vapor that hung over the forest. And the lights twinkling brightly from the Indian village were plainly visible to the eyes of the borderer.

"It's risky, but I'd better try it," muttered Ambrose, as he roused himself from the half-reverie into which he had fallen. "Perhaps I can find out where they keep her—if she is there—and free her easier than by the other plan. Besides, I don't fancy being idle so long."

Wraxall silently descended the tree, and after closely inspecting his weapons, glided rapidly along the hillside, in a roundabout course toward the Kickapoo village. The forest level was quickly gained, and then a short time brought Ambrose to the edge of the clearing, at a point almost directly opposite that where Manathe had broken away from Tony Ingo, the madman.

Only an occasional figure could be observed moving about the village, and Wraxall knew they entertained but little fear of an attack by enemies. Then, one by one, these figures disappeared, and the village seemed wrapped in death-like stillness.

The tall borderer glided stealthily forward, and soon gained the outer row of lodges. From these his keen ear could detect the steady breathing of the inmates, fast buried in sleep.

For fully an hour did the intrepid borderer

range the Kickapoo village, until scarce a lodge or hut but what he had reconnoitered, but still his object was not accomplished. Though he had heard the low moaning of the captured maniac, he had found no traces of Nell.

"Still, I believe she is there," he muttered, as he turned away from the town and strode rapidly toward his former place of concealment. "No doubt she was worn out with the weight of sorrow, and was sleeping. I must try the plan—it will work."

Ambrose regained his perch in the oak-tree, and composed himself for a short sleep, which he really needed. The sun had already shown itself in the east when he opened his eyes once more, and the Indian village below was all alive with men, women and children.

It was mid-forenoon when Ambrose Wraxall uttered a quick exclamation, and started erect upon the twisted limb, his face glowing with animation. His gaze was directed toward the village, but his eyes saw only one figure.

The figure was unmistakably that of a woman—of a maiden, as the lithe form and springy footstep proclaimed. She was alone, coming almost directly toward the borderer, though still in the clearing.

"'Tis she—I know it!" muttered Ambrose, as he hastily descended to the ground. "Now for it—win or lose!"

He glided rapidly down the hillside and through the forest, choosing a course that would intercept the maiden, unless she should diverge to one side. Then, as the edge of the clearing was neared, Ambrose checked his pace, with every sense upon the alert.

How correct had been his calculation, was quickly shown, for in a few moments a light footfall was heard, and then the figure of the maiden appeared, only a few yards to the right of where crouched Wraxall. She was strolling aimlessly onward, with no apparent purpose in view.

It was Manathe, the child of Old Pecan.

And yet Ambrose did not betray the slightest trace of disappointment; rather the contrary, for his eyes and face were all aglow with a peculiar exultation, as he crouched low down close beside a huge tree-trunk.

The maiden glided onward, little dreaming of the peril that threatened her. She seemed deep buried in thought—oblivious to all outward influences.

Such was the case. She was pondering over the words of her father, spoken in regard to the renegade, White Crow, a man whom she heartily loathed and detested, but who had been selected for her future lord and master.

Then, like the leaping of the crafty panther, Wraxall sprung forward and secured his prey. One arm twisted around the lithe, supple waist, while a broad palm rested firmly upon the maiden's mouth, thus effectually stifling the cry of alarm and horror that arose to her lips at this unexpected assault.

"Stop!" hissed Ambrose, in the Kickapoo dialect, his eyes gleaming down into hers, as his strong arms held her powerless. "If you are quiet, I will not harm you. But if you alarm the Kickapoos, I will kill you without mercy!"

The native courage of Manathe returned with

these words, and she bravely met his glance. She did not struggle, but lay in his arms quietly.

"Will you promise to be quiet, if I let you free?"

A nod of the maiden's head signified assent, and then Wraxall released her, though still standing where one motion of his hand could arrest any attempt at flight. But Manathe made no such effort, and standing proudly erect, met his gaze unflinchingly. Her voice was low and firm as she spoke:

"Who are you? What is your will with me?"

"I am Elk-Foot," proudly answered Ambrose, and his eyes glittered anew, as he noted the sudden start and the pallor that fell upon the maiden's cheeks as she heard this dreaded name. "Be not alarmed. I do not mean to harm you unless you so will it. Tell me if I guess aright—you are the daughter of Old Pecan?"

"Yes—I am Manathe."

"Good! Now listen to me. I have told you my name is Elk-Foot. My lodge is full to overflowing of Kickapoo scalps. I have killed more than I can count. And why? Because they murdered all of those living in whose veins flowed my blood. You are the first and only Kickapoo whom I have spared when their lives were in my hands. I will spare yours—I will set you free, if you obey my words. If not—if you refuse—then I will kill you," slowly and impressively uttered Wraxall.

"Manathe is the child of a great chief—she knows how to die," quietly replied the maiden.

"Good! You are very brave. The Kickapoo squaws are greater braves than their men. You have some of my people captive in your village?"

"Yes."

"And some of them are squaws—one of them much like you, only with a white skin?"

"Yes; there is one like you say."

"She is my friend. I must rescue her and take her back to her people, whose hearts are sick because their child is stolen from them."

"Elk-Foot is a great brave, and very cunning. But can he hope to work his will against the whole Kickapoo tribe? He talks in his sleep," scornfully retorted Manathe.

Ambrose smiled, and did not appear to be offended. He really admired this spirited forest beauty, but still held to his carefully projected plan.

"A fox can sometimes cheat the bear. Elk-Foot will put on the skin of a fox and cheat the Kickapoo," laughed Wraxall; then suddenly adding:

"Old Pecan loves Manathe?"

"She is his only child," simply replied the girl.

"Good! Then he will do much to save her life. He will give up one or two of his captives rather than lose his child?"

Manathe did not reply, but gazed keenly upon her captor. Her mute question was read aright by the giant borderer.

"Listen, and I will make my words clear. You are in my power, and I can kill you if I choose."

"The scalp of Elk-Foot weighs more than that of a Kickapoo squaw," interrupted

Manathe. "And the great chief will avenge his child."

"Elk-Foot does not take the scalps of squaws if he can help it. I will not take yours unless Old Pecan bids me do so. I will set you free, unharmed, if he will give me my friends—the young white squaw and the man whose brain has been touched by the hot finger of the Great Spirit."

"Let Manathe go to the village, and she will send the captives to Elk-Foot."

"No; they must be set free first."

"The daughter of a chief cannot lie," proudly uttered Manathe.

"Elk-Foot knows, but Old Pecan is not Manathe. He would not let you keep your word, but would send his braves instead of my friends. No, I will keep you a prisoner until he does as I say. If he refuses, then you shall die!"

"But how—you will go to the village?"

"Yes."

"You wear the skin of a goose, not that of a fox. Before you could speak, your scalp would hang at a chief's girdle," quietly replied Manathe.

"Not so. I will tell them that if they kill me, the child of their chief will also die—die of starvation, for I will hide you where they can never find you. But come—I am in haste to meet my friends. Will you walk, or shall I carry you in my arms?"

"Manathe will walk."

Wraxall turned and strode rapidly along through the forest, yet keeping close guard over his captive. She, knowing how futile would be any attempt at flight, submitted to the inevitable and quietly followed his lead.

The creek, before alluded to, was quickly reached, and turning, Ambrose took the captive maiden up in his arms and then entered the water, going *up-stream* toward the Indian village, thus almost retracing the course he had been following.

The creek cut its way through a range of low hills, not more than a mile from the village, and here Ambrose paused. Parting a mass of vine-covered bushes, a small hole in the almost perpendicular bank was revealed, into which he crawled.

Setting Manathe down upon her feet, he quickly produced a stout skin thong, with which he had provided himself while in the village for this very purpose. Then he spoke:

"You will stay here until I set you free. But to keep you from spoiling my plans, I must bind you. I am sorry, but my friends are more to me than you are. I mean no further harm than this, unless your people refuse my demand. If they do—you will die."

Manathe offered no resistance, knowing it to be useless, and in a few moments was lying securely bound. Then Ambrose secured her mouth so that she could not cry aloud, though rendering the gag as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

This completed he left the den, and carefully replaced the vines with a cunning hand. Eager to complete his bold plan, he hastened down the creek, following its devious windings for several miles before emerging upon the opposite side.

Right well did Ambrose Wraxall know the peril that would threaten him, in carrying out the daring plan he had conceived, but he had weighed the matter in all its details, and believing that it afforded a better chance of effecting his purpose than any other, he cared little for the danger he would thus incur.

Wraxall paused at the edge of the clearing, and uttered a loud, clear whoop, that could not fail to arouse the village. Then he stalked forward as though confident of a cordial reception.

The yell startled the Kickapoos, and they turned toward the point from whence it came. Then as they saw but one man, and he of a pale skin, they flocked toward him with angry surprise written upon their countenances.

Then as they recognized their hated enemy, Elk-Foot, a simultaneous yell of furious joy burst from the crowd, and as one man they rushed upon the bold intruder. Before this onset the stalwart borderer went down like a child, without a single blow in self-defense.

CHAPTER VI.

DISAPPOINTED HOPE.

ELLEN'S trial was exceedingly trying and painful, though with that exception she was well treated. She was allowed the little cave entirely to herself, being well supplied with choice bits of game and cool water from a neighboring spring.

Sometimes hours would pass by without her seeing or hearing anything of her two guards, but this negligence was only seeming, as she had learned. No sooner did she approach the cave entrance than a dusky savage would uprise before her, and motion her back.

Thus passed by three days and nights. Ellen was beginning to rally somewhat from the effects of her terrible bereavement, and, naturally, to think more of herself.

Her mind was now occupied with one purpose—that of escape from the hands of the Kickapoos. She pondered long and closely upon the words of Lad Pipe, the renegade, and now firmly believed he had spoken falsely regarding Ambrose Wraxall, when he declared him to be the instigator of her abduction.

The fourth day came and dragged slowly along. At meridian Ellen was furnished with her regular noonday meal by one of the savages. It was really palatable, and she partook of the meal heartily.

Ellen noticed one of the Indians take his rifle and stroll off down the hillside toward the river, while the other guard sat down before the cave, and lighting his pipe, began lazily smoking. Nell, ever thinking of escape, though now nearly despairing, watched him closely.

The ready rifle lay by his side, and as he smoked he kept close watch upon the river. Despondent, Ellen wished the rifle was only within her reach. In sport she had often fired one; how gladly would she have done so now, if by it she might win freedom.

With these thoughts Ellen slowly drew near the entrance, and then crouched down close beside the leafy screen. The Indian did not seem to have noted this movement, but his position

was so chosen that the captive could not emerge from the cave without passing within arm's length of him, or else by forcing a way through the tangled bushes.

Then a sudden ray of hope filled Ellen's mind. She pressed one hand upon her bosom as if to still its wild throbbings, while her eyes keenly, almost wildly, watched the savage.

It was a very slight thing occasioned this change. The Indian gave a short, quick nod, then started and glanced keenly around him.

Then, with a grunt, he reached for a live coal and relighted his pipe. And Ellen, with pulse beating furiously fast, watched him.

Once more there came a nod—then another. The smoke no longer curled upward from the lips of the savage. He nodded once more, and then settled back lazily against the scrubby bush.

The hearty meal, with the soothing fumes of the narcotic weed, was producing a natural effect. The Indian was fast yielding to sleep.

Ellen's mind was one turmoil of hope and fear. She thought that she might possibly escape, but dreaded lest the other guard should return before his comrade was sound enough asleep to allow her passage.

Slowly and cautiously, scarce daring to breathe, Nell parted the fringe of bushes and stepped forth from her prison. The red-skin did not stir, and his heavy breathing came as regular as before.

Nell glided forward an inch at a time, forced to pass so close by the somnolent sentinel that her garments nearly touched his form. One false step might prove fatal.

She paused as she gained his side, and hesitated. For the first time there came to her a thought of what lay beyond this step.

A shudder shook her frame, but then she decided. Stooping, Nell clutched the short, heavy rifle that lay upon the ground. She felt safer with it in her hands.

Then, step by step, checking her impatience with a strong exertion of will, the maiden receded from the cave and descended the hillside. When once out of sight of her late guard, Ellen sprung forward with a low, glad cry, believing that her escape was now assured.

But such was not to be. Her hopes were quickly dashed to the ground.

A clear, peculiar yell rung out upon the still air, and glancing tremblingly over her shoulder Ellen saw that her flight had been discovered, not by the sleeper, but by his comrade, who was just returning up the river-bank. She saw him rushing toward her, and also heard the voice of the awakened savage.

"Merciful God! I am lost!" gasped Ellen, as her trembling limbs almost failed her.

But then the sight of the two savages rushing toward her, with furious cries, lent her feet wings, and she sped along the hillside like a startled deer. It was only protracting the end; she well knew that in point of fleetness the Indians were far her superiors.

Still she fled on, until hearing the quick trampling gaining upon her, then in desperation she turned and stood at bay. The heavy rifle rose to a level, Ellen in her excitement handling it like a reed.

"Back! Do not touch me, or I fire!" she cried, as her eye flashed along the barrel.

The red-skins suddenly paused, evidently not a little surprised at this sudden move, but then with contemptuous grunts they sprung forward.

Ellen fired, but her nerves were so greatly agitated that her aim was wild. The leaden contents whistled harmlessly past the red-skins and skipped along the river surface until its force was spent.

Then a strong hand grasped her and wrenched the weapon from her grasp. Ellen bowed her head in mute submission to the blow she believed was coming, but it did not fall. Even in their rage the Kickapoos remembered the reward that had been promised them.

Trembling and exhausted, the maiden was led back to the prison, the somnolent guard being soundly berated by his comrade for his carelessness. Half dead, Ellen flung herself upon the couch of leaves, and gave way to a fit of bitter weeping.

The two guards settled down to their pipes, and all seemed as before. But the adventures of the day were not yet at an end.

Had Ellen been watching at the cave entrance, she might have noticed something that would have revived hope within her breast. Had she been gazing steadily out upon the river, her sharp eyes might have fell upon a small canoe, containing a single human figure, slowly descending the river close to its bank.

The savages, busily smoking, did not notice this. If they had, the sudden disappearance of boat and occupant might have startled them from their sense of fancied security.

Nearly another hour passed by, when the red-skins abruptly started and arose to their feet. After a moment's listening, one of them seized his rifle and glided stealthily along the hillside.

Several minutes elapsed after his disappearance, and then came a clear rifle-crack, closely followed by a shrill scream that sounded like that of a human being in mortal agony. The guard by the cave crouched still lower and listened eagerly.

A clear shout sounded from the point whence had proceeded the shot and yell, and shortly after there darted into view the figure of a white man, who ran rapidly toward the cave-prison. The Indian leveled his rifle and fired, but without effect; the pale-face's rush was not checked, and with another defiant shout he neared the cave.

For a moment the Kickapoo hesitated, but then, evidently not relishing the looks of his foe, he turned and fled from the spot. A taunting shout followed him, but he did not pause, and then the friendly trees hid him from view.

The white man did not check his pace, but rushed on until close beside the cave, when he paused and glanced curiously around him. The beaten ground before the entrance guided him, and parting the bushes he gazed wonderingly in upon Ellen, who had shrunk back upon hearing the wild alarm, trembling in every limb.

She saw that the face before her was that of one of her own race, and with a glad cry sprung forward. Then her strength failed her, and she would have fallen to the ground, had not his strong arms encircled her form.

With a strange light in his dark eyes, the man clasped her tightly to his breast and pressed his hot lips upon hers. Ellen started back with a frightened cry.

"Do not be alarmed, lady," said the stranger in a low, mellow tone, as he promptly released her. "I am a friend, and mean you no harm."

"A—a friend?" hesitated Ellen, suddenly remembering the words of Lad Pipe: that she had been abducted to serve the will of another.

"Yes, a friend. Surely you cannot doubt?" in a surprised tone. "If an enemy, methinks I would scarcely have taken the trouble to shoot one of your captors, and drive the other away. But I do not understand it; how came you here alone with them? This hole looks as if you had occupied it for some time."

Ellen briefly narrated her story, the stranger listening intently. A dark frown distorted his brow, and the muscles of his throat twitched angrily.

He was a tall man, symmetrically built, and neatly dressed in a suit of gray clothes. His complexion was dark, his hair long and curling, jetty black, as were his eyes. His face was smooth-shaven. His features were regular in outline, and in repose very handsome, but now, when excited by anger, they possessed an almost devilish expression, that instinctively prejudiced Ellen's mind against him.

"He lied to you—the hog! Ambrose Wraxall was never such a cur as that," he said, hotly; then adding more calmly: "'Tis a strange affair, and I can't see through it. But time will clear it all up, no doubt. Meantime, I am truly thankful that I chanced along as I did."

"How came you to know that I was held a captive here?" asked Ellen.

"I was coming down the river in a canoe when I heard a rifle-shot, and saw the bullet cut the water some distance ahead of me. So I drove in to shore, and from there I saw the redskins seize and drag you here. The distance was not so great but that I could tell you were of my race, and of course I resolved to assist you, if possible. Fortunately I succeeded as you see. One of your enemies lies out yonder dead; the other has fled."

"I am very, very thankful for this," murmured Ellen, strangely confused at the burning gaze of the man. "But is the danger really past? May not the savage return with help?"

"I hardly think so. He was too badly frightened for that. But it may be best to be on the right side, and we will be far away from here before he can possibly get back with any of his friends."

"Then you know where my—my friends live?" faltered Ellen, the words bringing back the dread reality that she was alone in the world.

"Yes. I have been there, several times. Ambrose Wraxall is my friend. You may have heard of me—Carl Storm?"

"No—I do not remember."

"Your memory is not so good as mine, then," and there was a trace of chagrin in his tones. "I can recollect one time; a fair young maiden while out riding, dismounting to gather some flowers, upon the prairie a long ways from home. Her horse darted off, and evaded all her

attempts at its capture. A stranger caught and returned the horse, receiving a smile as his reward, that is still as bright and fresh in his heart now, as then."

"And you—I remember now. But my mind is sadly confused of late. I can not think clearly," murmured Ellen, wearily.

"No wonder. But never mind. I have shown you that I know the way to your friends. You will trust me to take you there?"

There was something strange in the tones of Carl Storm, and Ellen glanced quickly up at his hotly-flushed face.

CHAPTER VII.

WORKING OF THE PLAN.

BORNE down by mere weight of numbers, Wraxall was bound hand and foot. It was not often that the Kickapoos had it in their power to test the bravery of such a foeman at the torture-stake; and to this ordeal the borderer was already doomed in the minds of all present.

At this moment a tall figure passed through the crowd, and stood near the captive.

The new-comer was the chief, Old Pecan. His eyes gleamed with a deadly fire, and his face was horribly distorted as he glared down upon the man whom the Prophet had pronounced was to destroy the chief.

Slowly the heavy hatchet was drawn from its loop, and then poised aloft. The eyes of the borderer glittered and his lip curled with scornful contempt.

"Old Pecan is very brave. He does not fear to strike a bound captive. Elk-Foot is ready. Strike! but when you strike you kill Manathe, as well as Elk-Foot," coolly uttered the giant borderer.

Old Pecan started, and then the uplifted weapon slowly sunk to his side. His face wore an expression of wonder, not unmingled with admiration.

"The tongue of Elk-Foot talks through a cloud. What can he know of a chief's daughter?"

"Manathe is not in the village," he replied, quietly. "She is far away, where she will stay, unless the chief treats with Elk-Foot. If you kill me, your child dies as well."

Old Pecan did not reply, but directed the braves to convey their captive to the strong lodge. Into this, a substantial log structure, Ambrose was carried, and closely guarded by two armed braves, though the bonds prevented him from lifting either hand or foot.

He well knew the meaning of this. He knew that a close and systematic search would be made for the missing maiden.

Time passed on and night came. Through small chinks in the roof the borderer could see stars shining brightly, and still no one came to him. His guard sat there, placidly smoking their pipes, as though totally unconcerned as to the final result.

But presently a heavy footstep resounded at the entrance, and one of the guards opened the door. A tall figure entered; that of Old Pecan, the Kickapoo chief.

Ambrose glanced quickly up, for he knew that the next few minutes would determine the fate of his plans, one way or the other.

Old Pecan spoke first. His voice was cold and steady and Ambrose could tell nothing from its tones.

"Elk-Foot spoke big words not long since, but what does he say now? Does he still think that the eyes of the Kickapoo cannot follow a trail, even while hidden in the water?"

These last words gave Wraxall a start, for he believed that Manathe had been found. In the gloom, this was not visible, however, and then he quietly replied:

"If Manathe is found then Elk-Foot is ready to die. He has forgotten his cunning, and it is time that he went to his fathers."

"Good—it shall be so. But tell me, why did you do this? Is your head weary of carrying a scalp, that you come and beg the Kickapoos to take it?"

"Ask Manathe—she will tell you why I came here," coldly replied Ambrose.

"A chief does not take counsel with squaws."

"Listen, chief. You come to Elk-Foot in the dark, and try to fill his eyes with dust, that he may not look straight. You say that a chief can not lie. Then tell me whether you have found Manathe?"

Old Pecan was silent, and Ambrose felt assured that the Indian girl had not been found.

"Good! You ask why I came to the village of the Kickapoos. Listen; I will tell you. I came here to see my friends, and to return them to their people, from whom they have been stolen. You have two captives here, who are my friends. One is a young squaw; the other is the one who belongs to the Great Spirit."

"Your friends are here; so are you. You shall see them. They shall stand by and sing the praises of Elk-Foot. They shall see what a great warrior he is. They shall see him conquer the fire and put the tortures of the Kickapoos to shame. Yes, you shall see them!"

"And Manathe?"

Old Pecan turned abruptly aside and was silent. Ambrose did not speak, though knowing that he held the winning card, so long as he alone knew where Manathe was concealed.

"Tell me where she is—tell me quick, or I will kill you like a wolf!" cried the old chief, fiercely, crouching over the captive with uplifted hatchet.

"Kill me and you will never know. She will die of hunger," sneered Wraxall.

"If you are allowed to go free, you will give her back?" hesitated Old Pecan.

"No—not for that alone. Give me my friends, and let us go free, and then Manathe shall come back to her father."

"Elk-Foot lies! He has killed Manathe, and now would run away. No! you must die—die at the fire-stake!"

"You do not trust me—why should I trust you? I tell you, chief, she is alive and well, only kept bound until I come to set her free. No one else can find where I have hidden her. Do as you please. Accept my terms and swear to keep the treaty sacred, and I will return her to you in safety. Do this or not—I care but little."

"You say a treaty—what treaty?"

"That for two days and two nights we will be at peace. During that time not a blow must be

struck, and each one is at liberty to go as they please, without being hindered. Swear to this, give me my friends, and all will be well."

"You say one of your friends is a young squaw?"

"Yes; with hair and eyes like Manathe, but with a white skin. Is she here?"

"Yes. Elk-Foot, you are a man; so am I. Then listen. Your people have killed all of my blood, save Manathe. The last one was Waconamee, who was to be chief when Old Pecan died. But the long-knives came, and killed him. They said he had been stealing horses, but it was a lie. He was a good friend to the pale-faces, like his father was, then. The great fighting chief, Whitesides, killed him. Now Manathe is the last, and she is very dear to my heart. It would kill me to lose her."

"You are a great brave, and have killed many of my warriors. Your scalp is very heavy. It is worth those of many squaws. But, though it is very big in my eyes, Manathe is worth still more to me. The chiefs and braves will object, but Old Pecan is king. I will do as you say. You shall go free with your friends, if you bring Manathe back. Will you trust the Kickapoo chief?"

There was unmistakable sincerity in the words and tones of the savage. Ambrose knew enough of his character to believe that he could be trusted where his honor was solemnly pledged.

"You swear by the bones of Waconamee that you will keep your word and let me go free, if I return Manathe, safe and well?"

"Yes; I swear it," solemnly repeated Old Pecan.

"Then set me free, and you shall see your child," promptly uttered Wraxall.

The old chief stooped and severed the skin thongs, when Ambrose arose to his feet. His limbs were somewhat cramped and benumbed, but a few moments' rubbing sufficed to restore circulation.

"Come," impatiently muttered Old Pecan. "Come—lead me to Manathe."

"Wait. First I must be sure that you have my friends here. There may be some mistake."

A single gesture of the chief's hand replied to this doubt, and then the two men emerged from the hut. Following the lead of Old Pecan, Wraxall soon found himself before the lodge into which he had seen Tony Ingo carried.

The old chief quietly lighted a torch and held it over the low pallet of skins, upon which lay the unfortunate boy, sleeping. That he was quite ill, was plain from the deeply-flushed cheeks and quick pulse.

His face and frame were strangely emaciated, for so short a time, and Ambrose felt the deepest pity as he gazed upon the wreck before him. The rays of the torch shining brightly into his face, awakened the sleeper, and with a low cry, his eyes opened and fell upon the giant borderer. His voice hissed low, but fiercely, between his tightly-clinched teeth:

"Ha! I know ye! I know ye now! You are the one who stole her away—my Nell! You stole her—but I'll avenge my love! I'll kill you—kill—!"

He endeavored to rise, but in vain. The fever that ran riot in his veins had robbed his limbs of their power, and he sunk back, trembling and helpless.

Still his burning eyes glared at Wraxall, and the long, bony fingers worked spasmodically, as though itching to clasp his throat. With an involuntary shudder, Ambrose turned away from the sad sight.

"That is one," he muttered, as they gained the outer air. "Now show me the other—the young squaw. If she is the one I seek, then our treaty is made. I will take you to Manathe."

"Come, then," briefly replied Old Pecan, as he turned from the lodge and glided along the narrow street.

"She is in here," he added, in a whisper, pausing before a small lodge. "You must not speak to her, or the squaw who watches over them will awake, and make trouble. Her son took the pale squaw captive, and intends her to fill his lodge. If he knew what you ask, he would have her stolen away and hidden, while we are gone for Manathe. He would kill her sooner than give her up to you."

Ambrose cautiously peered into the lodge, where burned a small lamp, suspended from the ridge-pole. Upon the pallet of skins reclined the form of a white girl, at the sight of whom the borderer's heart throbbed wildly.

One arm was flung over her face, but her hair and skin, with the graceful figure, seemed to him those of Nell Todd. This satisfied Ambrose as to Old Pecan's truth.

The words of the latter had been spoken in good faith, for he really believed that this captive was the one meant by Elk-Foot.

When the bargain was first made, the chief had intended to go alone with Wraxall to the place where Manathe was hidden, but suddenly he remembered the words of the Prophet, that he was doomed to meet his death at the hands of Elk-Foot. His superstition was fully aroused, and he feared to trust himself alone with the redoubtable warrior, lest the prediction should then and there be fulfilled.

"It is well. Come, now, and I will take you to your child," whispered Ambrose, as he withdrew from the loop-hole.

"Wait. I will be back in a moment," and then Old Pecan glided away, leaving Ambrose alone.

The borderer did not suspect treachery, for he had long known the chief, and believed that the oath sworn would be faithfully kept. So he waited in silence.

This was not long, for Old Pecan soon returned with half a dozen braves, all thoroughly armed. They expressed no surprise at seeing the borderer free, and at a gesture from Old Pecan, the late captive led the way from the village, closely followed by his dusky escort.

When captured, Wraxall's weapons had been taken from him, and since his return he had not asked for them, knowing well that such a request would be refused. The warriors who attended them were thoroughly armed, and seemed on the alert to guard against any sudden move of Elk-Foot.

As the little party entered the forest, Ambrose

suddenly paused and turned toward Old Pecan. A neglected precaution struck him.

"Chief, do these braves know what is our purpose?" he asked.

"Yes; they know we are going to find Manathe," hesitatingly replied Old Pecan.

"But they must know more," firmly added Wraxall. "They must know of our treaty."

"Does Elk-Foot call Old Pecan a dog?" angrily muttered the chief, at this hinted doubt.

"No. Old Pecan is a great chief; he cannot lie. But I would know that his braves are also satisfied. Tell them what we agreed upon, or I will not take you to Manathe."

Seeing the borderer's determination, Old Pecan did as he was bidden, and though his words were received in silence, the braves not daring to remonstrate, it was evident they did not relish the idea of losing their redoubtable captive. More at ease, since others had witnessed the chief's oath, Wraxall led the way to the creek.

This they entered, the savages surrounding Ambrose, their weapons in readiness for instant use, in case he should attempt a flight. But he had no such intention, as we know.

In a few minutes the deep cut was reached, and here Ambrose paused. In answer to the inquiring glances, he said:

"In there you will find Manathe. Lift the vines and you will see a small hole in the ground."

Old Pecan sprung forward and raised the leafy screen.

A moment of silence, then a wild cry from the cave, sounding hoarse and muffled. Then Old Pecan sprung forth, with a fierce yell of rage and disappointment.

What did it mean? Ambrose started in wondering amazement.

Old Pecan dashed aside the water, and sprung toward the giant borderer, a gleaming hatchet uplifted, his face showing horribly distorted in the bright starlight. He snarled rather than cried:

"Dog of a pale-face, die! You lied to me—Manathe is not there! You have killed her! Tell me where she is hidden, or I will tear your heart out and eat it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUER UNMASKED.

ELLEN gazed upon Carl Storm with a vague fear gaining ground in her breast. She instinctively retreated a pace, and flung up one hand as if to shield her face from the burning gaze that was riveted upon her.

Storm trembled in every fiber. His face was flushed like one who had been drinking strong liquors to excess, and a scorching glare filled his eyes.

"Why do you look at me so? You frighten me!" faltered Ellen, agitatedly.

"Do I? I did not intend to, then," he said, his voice sounding constrained and unnatural. "Miss Ellen, do you know that you are very, very beautiful!" he added, suddenly, advancing and reaching out an arm, as though he would possess himself of her hand.

Trembling with a fear she could not analyze, Ellen shrunk back still further. Her voice betrayed her inward uneasiness as she spoke;

"You—is this a time for such idle compliments, Mr. Storm? We are yet in danger, and—don't look at me so!" she added, angrily, her cheek flushing hotly.

"But I must. How can I help it?" added Carl Storm, more quietly. "You should not be so beautiful if you would escape admiring looks. Nay, don't frown. Only smiles should rest upon that sweet face. What! am I such a hideous ogre, that you look so frightened?"

"You do frighten me. There is a strange look in your eyes."

"Strange—and to you? Nay, but I must dispute that. 'Tis only my admiration—my love, that you see. Surely such looks cannot be strange to you!"

"Mr. Storm, you are very ungenerous. A gentleman would not take advantage of my situation to thus talk on subjects that you must know are unwelcome," retorted Ellen, haughtily.

"But if it is the truth? If a man loves, must he keep the secret locked up in his own breast?"

"Until a proper time and place, yes. This is no time for such idle jesting."

"Jesting, you say? Before Heaven, you wrong me. I am not jesting—far from it. I am in sober earnest. Ellen, I love you! I have loved you ever since that day we first met, out on the prairie. I did not mean to tell you this in words so soon, but I cannot control my feelings. I must say it—Ellen, I love you—I love you!" cried Carl, in a husky voice.

Ellen gazed upon him for a moment in mute astonishment. Then she spoke, firmly:

"I am sorry—very sorry for this; but since you have spoken so plainly, I will be equally as candid. I do not love you—I never can love you as a woman should love her husband."

"You do not love me—but do you love any one else?" demanded Storm, in a hoarse voice.

"You have no right to ask that."

"I saved your life when—"

"Is it generous to bring that up now? Would you make use of it to influence a woman's heart, through her gratitude?" interrupted Ellen, a little scornfully.

"Yes, when you are that woman, and I can prevail by no other means. Listen. I do not pretend to be perfect. When one is in love, he is never generous. I am in love with you. It is a passion that fills my whole being. With you, life would be a paradise; without you, it is a hell. I say I love you. Do you know what that means? It means good or ill, just as you will it to be."

"I do not ask you to say that you love me. I am willing to leave that to time. I will teach you to love, if you will let me. That is all I ask now. Give me this hope—tell me that in time you will learn to love me, and we will let the matter drop for the present."

"It must be dropped, and forever, without that promise," firmly replied Ellen.

"Then you love another?" he uttered hoarsely, his eyes gleaming and his face turning pale.

"Since you press it, yes. I do love another, with all my soul. I am betrothed to him, and, God willing, we will be wedded," bravely answered Ellen.

"And this—this man is Ambrose Wraxall?"

"You have no right to ask that."

"But I do ask, and you must answer."

"I will tell you, then. It is not Mr. Wraxall. Now will you let this very disagreeable subject drop?"

"When you say that you will be mine, I will; not before."

"Then stand aside and let me pass. I will not ask any favor from you. I will find my friends alone," impatiently cried Ellen.

"Wait. Do you know how far you are from them?" and a cruel smile curled his thin lips.

"No; but I can find my way to them."

"It is over twenty miles, and the woods are filled with prowling red-skins. You would be killed before you went half the distance, even if you knew the proper direction in which to travel."

"So be it, then! Better that than to remain here to be wantonly insulted by one who professes to be a gentleman," cuttingly retorted Ellen.

"This is idle," cried Storm, impatiently. "I will speak plainer. You still adhere to what you said?"

"Yes. I told you the truth."

"Then mark this. You shall never leave this spot until you promise to be mine—to be my wife. Is that sufficiently plain?"

Ellen turned pale and shrunk back. The evil light—the baleful light that fills a serpent's orbs—glittered in the dark eyes, and she trembled with a strange fear.

"What do you mean!" she faltered.

"Just this: I love you, and you must be mine, whether willing or otherwise. I have gone too far to retreat now. This, then, is what is before you. Promise to marry me at some time not far distant, and I will take you back to your friends. If not, then—well, I have sworn that you should be mine, and I will keep my oath," added Storm, in a determined tone.

"Merciful God! I was right, then—I feared it! You are the man he spoke of?" gasped Ellen, in horror.

"Yes, you have it all now. I saw and loved you. You were coldly polite, and I saw that I could not win you then—I had not time. But I did not forget you. I returned there when my business would allow, only to learn that you were betrothed to young Ingo. It was a fearful blow! Then, in my madness—for I really believe that I was mad then—I hired Lad Pipe to carry you off. But as God hears me, I did not intend any harm should befall your parents. In that he exceeded orders."

"I meant to come here and act as your rescuer, thinking that I could teach you to love me, and to forget that boy, who is not worthy one thought from you. Had you given me a single ray of hope, you would never have known this. I would have taken you home safely, and trusted in time to win you. But you prevented all this by your scornful words."

"I said I had gone too far to retreat, even if I wished; but I do not so wish. I will carry it out now, to the bitter end. You are here alone, in my power, and, sooner or later, you must succumb. But don't misunderstand me. I mean to act honestly with you, if you do not spoil all by your obstinacy. I will marry you, and

treat you tenderly, if you will have it so. If not, you will find that my passion is not one to be checked by trifles. Reflect well upon your course. You can win happiness or the most abject misery, just as you elect."

During this speech, which was delivered with passionate energy, Ellen stood like one petrified. But as he continued, showing himself in such colors, her native courage returned.

She was no longer a trembling maiden, but the proud, spirited woman, whose will might be curbed, but not bent. Her voice rung out clearly, as she spoke:

"And this is the man who seeks to win a woman's love! Truly, sir, you present strong arguments. No doubt you expect me to fall down and worship at your feet. But I will not stand and bandy words with you. I gave you my answer, once for all—I will have nothing to do with you. Do your worst—I defy you!"

"Bah! Stout talk, but wait. There are means of which you do not dream, that I can and will use to break your spirit. It is only a matter of time. Triumph I will, spite of everything. You do not dream of the power I possess. But first, I will try more quiet means. I will keep you here a prisoner until you can reflect better what to do. So long as I have you in my power, I can afford to wait."

"If you wait until I yield, we will both be gray-haired," quietly remarked Ellen.

Storm laughed shortly.

"You think so? Very well. Now I will call up your friends, as I suppose you would prefer having them as company to others."

He stepped outside and gave a peculiar whistle. In a few moments the two guards, whom Ellen had believed either slain or driven off, made their appearance.

"You see, they have come back," laughed Carl.

"Very well. I prefer their company to yours."

Storm bit his lips; but, with a powerful effort, he controlled his passion, and turned aside to where stood the two Kickapoos, curious observers of this stormy interview.

Storm eyed them slowly for a space, and seemed to be reading their characters. The conclusion he arrived at appeared to be satisfactory, for he spoke in a confident tone.

"My red brothers have done well, and have earned their reward. The goods shall be theirs, as White Crow promised them. Will they be going on the war-path again soon?"

"No. The great chief, Old Pecan, raises his voice for peace. He says it is not good; that the pale-faces are too many, and that the red-man only fights them to die," replied one of the Indians.

"You like rum? It is good; I see you do," said Storm, as he noticed how their small eyes brightened at the magic name. "Very well. If you serve me, you shall have it in abundance. I wish to keep this pale squaw here for a few days longer, but I cannot stay to watch her. I wish you to do this. If you will, for each day you watch, I will give you each one flask of rum, to make your hearts glad. Are my words good?"

The Kickapoos withdrew to one side, and con-

versed earnestly for a few moments, when they seemed to arrive at a decision.

"Open Hand says his brothers have earned the goods promised them by White Crow?" continued the savage.

"Yes."

"Where is the fire-water?"

"Down in my canoe."

"Good! Give it to us, and then we will watch the squaw as long as you say," eagerly added the red-skin, his eyes glittering.

"Good. One of you come with me to bring the things up here."

In a few minutes more, the promised articles were stowed away in the little cave, and the Kickapoos were already sampling the cherished liquor. Storm turned to Ellen, saying, in a mocking tone:

"Farewell, my bonny bride. I deeply regret the necessity, but I must tear myself away from your charming presence. But it is only for a short time—let that thought console you, and do not dim the luster of those beautiful eyes by tears, that I'd not come sooner. In three days from this I will come to receive your answer."

Ellen did not reply, and after a longing look at her stony features, Carl Storm abruptly withdrew from the cave, and after renewing his instructions to the Kickapoos, he hastened down the hillside, and entering his canoe, paddled rapidly up the river.

As he disappeared from view, Ellen sunk down upon the leafy couch, and covering her face with her hands, wept long and bitterly. The courage that had upheld her during the presence of the wolf, now fled, and she was once more the desponding, heart-sick captive.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAN FRUSTRATED.

WE left Ambrose Wraxall in a truly critical situation. Totally unarmed, standing in the midst of half a dozen bitter enemies, waist-deep in the water, while Old Pecan was springing upon him, with uplifted hatchet, furious with anger and vengeance.

For a brief instant the giant borderer stood in mute amazement. He could not at first comprehend the meaning of this sudden change.

But then he believed that he penetrated the meaning of the old chiefs actions. He believed that, all along, Old Pecan had intended treachery, and was only simulating amity until he should learn where his stolen child was hidden.

Now that he knew this, the meditated plan was to be carried out. Pretending that Ambrose had deceived him, Old Pecan seized upon this as a pretext to kill his foe, and thus set at naught their treaty.

This was the purport of the thoughts that flashed with the rapidity of lightning through Wraxall's mind, and knowing that only the most prompt action could save him from death, he followed the one course that offered a chance of escape.

The infuriated chief leveled a fierce blow at the borderer's head, but he had to deal with one whose venturous life had rendered him familiar with just such emergencies, and whose actions were as decided as his thoughts. With an agile twist, Ambrose bent his body so that the weap-

on only cut the thin air, the impetus throwing Old Pecan off his balance.

What ensued was so rapid that the eye could scarce follow it. It was in such situations of imminent peril that Elk-Foot had gained his great celebrity among the red-skins.

One huge fist shot out like a catapult, alighting full upon the exposed throat of Old Pecan, hurling him half out of the water against the steep bank. At the same moment, Wraxall's left hand seized the heavy hatchet with which the chief had intended to cleave his foe's skull.

Thus far the Kickapoo braves had not moved, so sudden were the events and so great their surprise. But with the fall of their chief, they broke the spell that fettered their limbs, and sprung to seize upon the borderer.

The foremost one fell as though beneath a lightning bolt, his skull shattered to atoms by the heavy hatchet, wielded by Wraxall's left hand. Then, with a howl of fury, he sprung into their midst.

A second brave felt the keen weapon, and joined his comrade along the trail of death. And then the giant swung his powerful right arm around, brushing the warriors from his path like blades of grass before the mower's scythe.

With a defiant shout, Ambrose plunged headforemost into the dark water, and sinking low down he swam rapidly with the current. Then, and not till then, did the braves think of their rifles.

These were immediately leveled at a dusky form in the water, but only one of them was discharged. The priming of the others had become dampened by the spray cast up during the brief but desperate *melee*.

A fierce tumult now arose in the direction of the Kickapoo village, and these yells were promptly echoed back by the survivors of the struggle. They knew that their friends had been aroused by the noise, and were now rushing toward the point from whence it had proceeded.

Old Pecan had only been stunned by the crushing blow from the fist of his enemy, and was recovered sufficiently to speak, taking in the real facts at a single glance. Full of rage, he cried:

"After him—do not let him escape! Follow the dog—take him alive if you can, but do not let him escape to boast of how he threw dust in the eyes of the Kickapoos!"

Those whom he addressed were chosen and tried warriors, skillful, bold and true. And knowing as they did that Elk-Foot was comparatively unarmed, they rushed down-stream, confident of effecting his capture. With them went Old Pecan, sending up an occasional yell to guide the footsteps of those following.

But they had a cunning foe to deal with. Ambrose, though momentarily confused by the sudden attack, while himself acting in good faith, now fully realized his situation, and prepared to overcome the threatened peril.

At the moment he turned and dove down-stream, his plan was formed.

With the hatchet still firmly clutched in his hand, Ambrose swam with fishlike rapidity down the creek, his progress greatly accelerated

by the water being so shallow, for his strong legs spurning the bottom he progressed at a marvelous pace. Then when he arose to the surface for breath, he was through the deep cut and at a point where the creek banks ran along low and easy to reach.

At this moment he heard the orders of Old Pecan to his braves, and knew that the chase had begun. A low chuckle broke from his lips, for he knew that he had gained sufficient ground to put his plan into execution, with a fair prospect of success.

"Good! I'll fool 'em yet!" muttered Ambrose, as he sprung lightly up the bank and glided into the dense shadows cast by the overhanging trees. "They'll never think of such a move, but 'll think I've run straight on, half-frightened to death. Bah! do the fools think a true woodsman will leave his weapons behind him? Ha!" he added, as the yells came closer. "They're pursuing. And hark! there they come from the village. Good! 'tis just as I would have it!"

Ambrose could plainly hear the savages, led by Old Pecan, splashing by, and then after a short time the heavy trampling of those coming from the town. He crouched low down beside a tree-trunk, until confident that all had passed by.

Then he arose and glided rapidly, yet with truly marvelous silence, through the woods toward the Indian village. As usual with those whose life is passed much in solitude, Wraxall's thoughts found utterance in low mutterings:

"They must have suspicion of what is up. At the alarm they would naturally think of my escape, and look in the lodge. If so, pretty much all the warriors have left the village. At all events, I must have my rifle, and, if I can get it, when they return it'll only be to find another of their captives missing," chuckled Ambrose, for this was the resolve he had taken.

Confident that Ellen—for he believed the dark-haired captive was indeed that maiden—would still remain in the lodge where he had seen her, probably with no other guard than the old squaw, he hoped to set her free, during the confusion anent his escape. As for Tony Ingo he knew that he could do nothing for him then, while the fever was upon him, but he also knew that the young man was safe so long as he continued insane, at least from the Indians.

Feeling that he had no time to lose, Ambrose hastened along, partly circling around the village, intending to enter it at a point nearly opposite that by which he had left it, as being safer. A comparatively short time carried him to the spot chosen, and then, crouching low down, he glided out into the open space, and approached the cluster of dingy huts.

There were numerous figures to be seen, but were mostly gathered in the small open square near the center of the village, where was built a small fire. Among these Ambrose could distinguish but few grown braves, not more than half a dozen at most, for, as he had anticipated, the others had been drawn off by the alarm at the creek.

Ambrose glided stealthily along, and paused beside the nearest lodge. All was dark and silent within, but, as he glanced around, he de-

tected a glimmer of light from a crevice in the side of the hut next to where he stood.

It was in such as these that he must look for weapons, and so the borderer advanced until, by stooping, he could peer into the lodge. Almost the first objects that his eyes fell upon were the articles he coveted; a rifle, from whose muzzle depended a powder-horn and bullet-pouch.

But there was an obstacle in the way of gaining them, one, too, that bade fair to foil his purpose in that direction, at least. Crouching before the smoldering embers, smoking a pipe, was an old squaw, wrinkled and hideously ugly.

"Curse the luck!" muttered Ambrose, eying the weapons wistfully. "Only for that witch, I would be fixed. Why don't the fool go out where the rest are? Ha!" he added, in a fierce whisper, as a brand broke, and falling burst into a bright blaze, "'tis the old gun—my own rifle, by my father's beard!"

Cautiously gliding around the lodge, Ambrose paused before the rude door-flap of skin. This he gently raised, stepped within, and then suffered the skin to drop behind him.

The squaw still sat smoking, totally unsuspecting of the threatening peril, so stealthy and silent had been the movements of the borderer. Her back was turned toward Wraxall, but he could see she was very old.

His course was already decided upon. He sprung forward and wound his long, sinewy fingers tightly around the old hag's throat, effectually checking all outcry from her lips.

In terrible affright at the sudden assault, the squaw made no resistance, and Ambrose quickly disposed of her. Still clutching her throat with one hand, he tore a piece of cloth from her dress, and stuffed it into her mouth, securely gagging her.

Over this he bound a strip of skin, and then dragged his captive to a pile of furs, upon which he tossed her. Ambrose grasped his rifle, seeing that it was loaded, and renewed the priming, after which he secured the ammunition to his person, together with a heavy knife which he confiscated.

Feeling increased confidence from his success thus far, Ambrose emerged from the tent and glided directly for the lodge where he had seen the captive maiden, whom he had mistaken for Ellen Todd. Here his work would in all probability be more delicate and attended with greater danger, for the lodge was but a short distance from the square, where was congregated a great crowd of women and children, together with the braves before alluded to.

As in the other hut, there was a light burning in this lodge, and aided by it, Ambrose quickly found a crevice through which he could take observations. At first he could see no living being but the figure of an old squaw, who was busied the same as the one whom he had so summarily disposed of a short time previously.

Then, however, as he glanced downward, he saw a wealth of black hair, and a glimpse of a white neck, that told him he was standing directly behind the one whom he had resolved to rescue. His pulse beat rapidly as he believed that Nell was there, their forms almost touching, with but a skin wall between them.

But with a strenuous effort, Ambrose subdued

his emotion, and set about his work with all the coolness he had thus far displayed. He saw that a double peril attended this move, for both enemy and friend were awake.

He could secure the old squaw, he believed, without raising an alarm, but would not his abrupt appearance so frighten Ellen that she would utter a cry of surprise, which could hardly fail to bring the entire gathering down upon them.

"She is brave and quick-witted," he muttered, decisively. "I will speak to her first. It is the safest way."

Ambrose drew his knife, and cautiously passed its keen edge along the dried skin. The noise thus produced was scarcely perceptible, but the maiden heard it, and quickly turned her head, fortunately not being noticed by the watcher.

"Hist!" whispered the borderer, placing his lips close to the aperture. "Not a word or motion, for your life! I am a friend, come to rescue you. Do not speak or move, no matter what I may do, or the whole tribe will be upon our backs."

The light was dim and uncertain, so Ambrose had only an imperfect glimpse of her face. He still believed it was Ellen, the one whom he so tenderly and faithfully loved.

To gain the interior of the lodge, by way of the regular entrance, Wraxall would have to appear directly to the right of the old squaw, where she could scarcely fail of seeing him, in time to utter a cry that might prove fatal. And now that he was at ease regarding the captive, Ambrose resolved to enlarge the slit and enter beside her.

The keen knife made quick and merciless work, and the next moment Ambrose stood erect within the lodge. As before, he sprung upon the unsuspecting hag, and clutched her throat with a vise-like grip.

But then occurred an event that set at naught all his skillful progress, and precipitated a direful tragedy. It was something that he had not foreseen, and could not guard against.

Ambrose turned his head and whispered:

"Ellen, bring me a skin to— My God!"

His speech ended in a wild cry of wondering bewilderment, and he started back as though confronted by a phantom. As the maiden sprung up the light shone clearly upon her features, and for the first time he knew that he had been deceived.

"Merciful Heaven! you are not Ellen! Who are you?" he gasped, agitatedly.

"I am— But look! The woman!" cried the pale-faced captive, but the warning came too late.

The squaw, whose throat Ambrose had released in his amazement, had recovered from the suffocating pressure, and rolled swiftly to one side, setting up a frightful screeching, that testified to the strength of her lungs. Ambrose sprung forward and dealt her a heavy blow with his foot, but the harm was already wrought.

From without he could hear the shrill yells of women, mingled with the hoarser shouts of men, and then the heavy rush of many feet coming in this direction.

"Curse the luck!" snarled Wraxall, as he seized his rifle. "The red-skins are upon us!"

"Do not desert me—for the love of God do not leave me to them!" cried the girl, who was the innocent cause of all this confusion, springing forward and clasping the borderer's knees.

"I will not; but come, we must run for it. Once in the woods and we're safe. Lean heavily upon my arm, and run for dear life. It's our only show now," hastily muttered Ambrose, as he passed through the hole and entered the open air.

The old woman was now screeching anew, and the Indians, thus directed, were making directly toward the lodge, that alone hid the fugitives from their eyes. Not two-score yards intervened, and as soon as the savages should enter the hut, the severed skin would tell them in which direction to look for their prey.

Knowing this, Ambrose darted away at a rapid rate, having no fears of their footsteps guiding the foe, as their own trampling effectually drowned it, and a good start must be gained did they hope to reach the forest before their enemies were upon them.

The fugitives cleared the outer row of lodges, and then darted away over the level ground. The starlight was bright, and until the forest was gained they would be in full view of any one looking in their direction from the village.

The maiden ran fleetly, for she was nerved by terror and a hope of freedom. But they had not traversed two-score yards ere the horde of savages broke out into full view, upon their track. Had he been alone, Ambrose would have laughed them to scorn; but now, incumbered with a feeble maiden, he knew there was great danger, both to himself and to her.

Proof of this came full soon. The foremost of the red-skins were the warriors whom Wraxall had noticed upon first entering the town.

These slackened their pace, and leveling their rifles, fired upon the pale-faces. Ambrose uttered a taunting laugh as he heard the bullets whiz past him, not one even touching his garments, but then a sickening dread assailed him.

He felt the hand upon his arm close convulsively, while a low, gasping groan met his ear. Then the maiden staggered and fell heavily against him, while something had sprinkled his hand.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, eagerly, pausing.

There came no reply in words, but the maiden sunk at his feet. Ambrose stooped and essayed to raise her.

Wild, triumphant yells broke from the lips of the red-skins as they noted the effect of their volley, and they sprung forward in hot haste. They believed that both the fugitives were down.

However, they soon learned their mistake. The giant borderer seemed transformed into a very demon at the bloody death of this strange maiden, for he believed she was dead.

He heard their exultant cries, and sprung to his feet, his massive frame quivering in every fiber. His eyes glared like living coals, and his voice rose in a wild, hoarse, howl-like cry of angry excitement, as he sprung boldly forward to meet the foe.

The foremost paused at that cry. They quickly recognized it as that of their terrible foe, Elk-Foot. The women and children turned and

fled, shrieking wildly, while the younger youths seemed about to follow the example thus set.

The borderer's long, heavy rifle uprose and vomited forth its leaden contents. With an agonized death-yell one of the Kickapoo braves sprung high into the air, falling in a quivering heap to the ground, shot through the brain.

"Ha! ye cowardly squaws—come and find a warrior!" shouted Ambrose, as he sprung toward his foes, hatchet in hand. "I am Elk-Foot—I am hungry for scalps!"

Fortunately for the rash borderer, the firearms of his enemies were all empty, or it might have fared ill with him. With one accord the boys turned and scampered after the fleeing squaws, leaving only four or five men to confront the terrible Elk-Foot.

This they did not do long. Before Ambrose was within a score yards of their position, they also turned and fled with yells of terror, so great was their fear of the giant borderer.

The borderer hastened back to where the maiden had fallen, knowing not that this alarm would draw back at least a part of the Kickapoes from their search after him, when hot pursuit would be given the daring enemy. If the girl still lived, he was yet far from being safe.

But his worst fears were confirmed as Ambrose stooped over the motionless form. He saw that she was indeed dead. Two bullets had struck her, one of them piercing her head, and death must have been almost instantaneous.

"Poor girl! a sad fate, but better than what awaited you there," muttered Wraxall, gloomily, as he gently raised the still figure in his arms. "But I'll not leave you here for those curs to mistreat. You shall be safe from them in your last resting-place, at least."

With the corpse in his strong arms, the borderer strode rapidly along and soon entered the forest. There he paused to reload his rifle, and glanced back toward the village.

He could see the savages running to and fro, in great excitement, but none of them appearing to care about following his trail. A grim smile momentarily curled his lips, as he muttered:

"The cowardly curs! They know me, and fear to follow. But, God helping me, they shall know me still better for this black night's work. 'Tis a sad ending to my bright hopes. I thought to save Nell—but she—this *must* have been the one I saw."

Ambrose again gathered up his still burden, and once more glided through the dense woods. His pace did not slacken until he had gained the banks of the creek, over a mile distant from the Kickapoo village.

"'Tis a damp grave, poor girl!" and there was a husky tremor in his voice as he spoke. "But better lie here in quietness than to have those cursed ghouls defile your grave to obtain your scalp, were I to put you in the ground."

Ambrose waded out into the stream, and followed up its windings until he found a heavy stone that would answer his purpose. This he attached to the body, and lowered them to the creek bottom.

"God rest your soul, poor girl!" muttered the hardy borderer, as he stood with uncovered head.

For several moments Ambrose stood thus, bur-

ied in deep thought. But then, with a start, he roused himself, giving utterance to a low, scornful laugh.

"Turning parson? No, no, 'Brose; there's very different work cut out for you."

Wraxall crossed the stream and entered the forest, where the dense shadows would effectually screen him from the view of any one passing by. Leaning against a tree-trunk, he pondered upon the situation, his thoughts finding utterance in a low, distinct tone.

"Either Old Pecan fooled me from the very first, or else Manathe managed to escape or was found by some friend before we got there. But in either case she is free now, and will take good care to keep out of my way. So *that* plan is knocked on the head.

"Another thing, equally certain. The imps 'll follow my trail and wipe me out, if it can be done. 'Twouldn't do to let one man beard them as I have done this night, and then get free to boast of it. They'll try their best, now. Good! I'll do the same, and the smartest takes the pile.

"Now if Nell really *is* there, they don't know she is the one I was after. If they did, 'twould go hard with the poor girl. If Old Pecan was playing fox from the first, he would show her to me, so I would believe he was playing fair. If he was in earnest, then he'd do the same, knowing that if otherwise I would back out. So either she is not there, or he didn't know who I was after. If *yes*, then she is safe for awhile, at any rate until they do their best to rub me out. With the whole pack at my heels, I can't stay around here; that's settled. But where 'll I go? Ha!" and Ambrose started erect, while a glow of surprise lighted up his features.

"Lad Pipe—White Crow! Why didn't I think of him before? By the beard of my father! I believe I have struck the right trail at last! If not here she *must* be there, at his village. I must leave here for a spell—why not try there? I will!"

A word will explain the broken mutterings of Wraxall. There were two settlements of the Kickapoos in Illinois at the time treated of; one of them commanded by Old Pecan; the other—much smaller, and subject to the control of the first-named chief—with two leaders, Lad Pipe and an old Indian chief.

A distance of some forty miles separated the two villages, and, knowing that he could not remain in the vicinity of Old Pecan's town undiscovered, Ambrose resolved to visit the other settlement, knowing that Nell would be comparatively safe so long as the quest continued, if indeed she was a captive in the place.

Prompt to act, Wraxall at once set forth upon his journey, making a wide detour around the village, and then entering the creek in which he quickly lost his trail. We do not propose to follow him on his journey, just at present.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOLF AT BAY!

ELLEN'S second term of captivity was even more trying and painful than the first. Truly her situation was one not to be envied.

Not only did she suffer acutely in mind, but in body as well. Besides the haunting dread of

what might be the end of all this, when, the days of probation at an end, Carl Storm should return for her answer, Ellen was forced to endure the pangs of thirst and hunger as well.

So long as her guards were working for their reward, they had treated Ellen with comparative kindness and consideration, but now the case was vastly different. They had been paid, and devoted themselves entirely to the enjoyment of their reward.

A five-gallon keg of whisky is a pretty tough customer for even two rum-loving red-skins to handle, and the victory is a question of time, even when the attack is maintained with the vigorous pertinacity shown in this case. An Indian differs from a white man in this respect, at least: he never gets so drunk that he can not swallow more, when the proper liquid presents itself at the sluice-way.

Scarcely had Carl Storm disappeared, when the keg was on tap, and the quality of its contents liberally tested. That this was satisfactory, the gratified grunts amply evidenced, and hope once more sprung up in Ellen's heart, as she saw how eagerly and copiously they were guzzling the fiery liquor.

But these hopes were quickly banished, for the red-skins had not yet forgotten her recent attempt at flight, and, with an eye to earning the additional treat promised, they put it out of her power to give them the slip, before systematically proceeding to get drunk. As their employer had advised, they bound the maiden hand and foot.

They drank as though the contents of the keg were inexhaustible. As the spirits in it lowered, theirs raised correspondingly. Still they did not entirely forget their native caution, and their ebullitions were subdued.

Consequence: they were two beautifully muddled red-skins. Claspings the keg in a close and loving embrace between them, the doughty warriors lay down and united their snoring in harmonious concert.

As they lay just within the cave entrance, Ellen had been a witness to all this. And, as she saw them yield to their liquid foe, she knew that only the thongs kept her from freedom.

To remain meant more than death, and though the peril would be great, she resolved to flee, if possible. And upon the buckskin thongs she proceeded to work.

But it proved to be labor spent in vain. The bonds had been applied by a cunning and far from tender hand. They were drawn to their utmost tension, and had already sunk deep into the tender flesh.

Ellen struggled desperately. The hard thongs chafed and cut deeper into her wrists, lacerating the skin until the hot blood trickled freely down over her hands.

At length, worn out by the fierceness of her endeavors, added to the acute pain thus produced, Ellen sunk back, breathless and fainting. Her heart despaired, and she believed that all was lost.

Thus passe! the long, dreary days. The Indians seemed to have little thought for aught other than their keg and its precious contents. It furnished them with both food and drink.

Ellen, meanwhile, suffered acutely from both

hunger and thirst. Not until night of the second day did she succeed in making the Indians comprehend her wants, as neither of the Kickapoos understood her language.

After she had eaten and drank the bonds were readjusted once more, and the two brutes again addressed their devotions to the liquor. Luckily this was running low, else Ellen might have starved to death.

The morning of the fourth day found the keg empty, and the savages correspondingly low-spirited and cross. But, remembering that Carl Storm was to come before night, they treated Ellen with more consideration.

Her hunger and thirst satisfied, and her limbs freed from the torturing bonds, Ellen composed herself to much needed repose. She knew she would require all her strength when the wolf came to visit his intended prey.

She was awakened by the sound of voices, and, sitting up, her eyes fell upon the hated figure of her captor. Storm started back as he noted the pale and haggard countenance.

"My poor darling!" he murmured, in a low, soft tone, as he glided to her side and attempted to take her hand. "How you must have suffered!"

"I have indeed suffered, and it is you I have to thank for it," coldly replied Ellen, drawing back from the proffered hand. "No, sir, I will not disgrace myself by touching the hand of such a cowardly ruffian as you have proved yourself to be."

Storm stepped back, with a strange look upon his face; a look not wholly of anger, but mingled with acute pain. His voice trembled as he spoke:

"Ellen, don't speak so. You must know me better by this time. I love you and wish to treat you tenderly, if you will only allow me. I would never have acted so harshly if you had not driven me half-mad by your biting taunts and scorn. Do you think it is a pleasure to me to see you suffer? Have I not suffered? Yes! more—a thousand times more than you have. It has been a greater pain to me than if I had received it myself. I love you so wildly—I would have you as happy as the day is long, if you were not so obstinate. You force me to act with such cruelty, and then blame me alone. Ellen, give me your promise, and believe me, my entire future life shall be devoted to one end—that of making you forget all that has passed, and only remember that I love you better, more dearly, than life or salvation!"

"You say you love me—prove it by setting me free. Then—and not until then—will I believe you."

"You ask impossibilities. You ask me to plunge the knife into my own heart. No, I cannot do that, anything else—anything but that," he added, passionately.

"That is all I wish. That or nothing."

"Ellen, you will drive me mad! I came here intending to make amends for my seeming harshness, but you will not have it so. You push me on to—I shudder when I think what! Think—reflect well before you go too far. I am only human—only weak flesh and blood, and beyond a certain point I cannot control myself. I pray you, do not push me beyond that point!"

There was genuine feeling in his tones, and Ellen gazed upon him wonderingly. She could not comprehend him—his character was an enigma beyond her power to solve.

"Sir, you can be a true gentleman, if you will only choke down your base passions. Forget all this, allow me to go free, and all will yet be well. By the memory of your mother, be she dead or alive, I ask you this," cried Ellen, brokenly.

"Do you know what you ask? You ask me to cast aside everything that I adore—or tear out my own heart and cast it into the fire! No, I cannot—will not! I love you—I ever shall love you, and though you may never return this feeling, you shall never bestow it upon another save in thought. I have sworn that you should be mine, and by all that's holy you shall be!" cried Storm, excitedly, his eyes beginning to fill with the old baleful light.

"You rave. That will never come to pass," said Ellen, firmly.

"Never? But it *shall*! How can you hinder me? We are here alone, far from any living soul—for these two brutes are at my beck and call—and the result you can guess. Again I beg you relent. 'Twill be better for us both that you relent. I distrust myself more than ever you can, for I know my disposition better. Promise me—I only ask that—you will not keep this engagement with that boy; that you will allow me an opportunity of winning your love, and I will let you go free."

"If I broke one solemn pledge, would I not another?" calmly returned the maiden, gaining fresh courage as she noted his irresolution. "I have pledged myself—I love him with my whole heart—if I am ever asked to keep that pledge, I shall do so."

"Obstinate girl! will no words of mine make you realize your peril? Will you keep pushing me back into the darkness, until it is too late? The struggle is hard enough already. Beware! I tell you that you are in danger—that we are both in great and frightful danger!"

"You repent! Thank God, there is still some good left in your heart—all is not evil! Let me pass, then. I do not ask your help. Let me pass, and we will never meet again. In time you will forget; such a bad, fierce passion must soon eat itself away, and then you will be thankful for this one act of justice. Let me pass—I promise to forget and forgive all that has passed between us," pleaded Ellen, trembling with mingled hope and fear.

Carl Storm gazed down upon her kneeling form, and his stately figure quivered in every fiber. His face, pale, wan, and haggard, told how fierce had been the passion that still raged within his breast.

Ellen looked surpassingly beautiful then, as she knelt upon the sandy floor of the cave, her hands clasped and uplifted, as she pleaded for freedom, her large, lustrous eyes appealingly raised to the face of her captor. Her cheeks were flushed with hope, her red lips parted in suspense, the long, luxuriant blue black hair floating downward, encircling her peerless form like a veil.

The man gazed down upon her in almost breathless suspense. Never before had he be-

held such an enchanting picture, one that delighted his sense of the beautiful, and at the same time caused mad passions to run riot through his veins. The baleful light once again filled his eyes, and his breath came with difficulty.

The temptation was too strong. His good angel hid her head and fled from his heart.

Ah, Ellen, better for thee, at that moment, hadst thou been born deformed, or frightfully hideous in feature!

"You ask too much," hoarsely muttered Carl Storm, one hand loosening the collar at his throat, as though its pressure choked him. "You ask more than I can grant. You are too peerlessly beautiful to lose. You must—you *shall* be mine!" and he sprung toward the maiden, who nimbly eluded his clutch, motioning him back with one hand.

A coarse chuckle just then echoed through the cave, and quickly turning, Storm beheld the two savages standing at the entrance evidently highly amused at the scene. His eyes glittered angrily, but he knew that he was, in a manner, in their power, and policy smothered his rage.

He advanced to them, saying:

"My red brothers are thirsty?"

A quick grunt gave assent, and one of the dusky toppers significantly kicked over the now empty keg. Storm smiled; he understood the motion.

"Good! The throats of my brothers shall not remain dry long. They have watched the pale squaw for three suns. That makes three flasks of rum for each one of you. Open Hand does not speak with a crooked tongue. He did not forget his brothers. The rum is in his canoe. Go and drink it there. Wait until I call you."

The Kickapoos only paused to jerk out one sonorous grunt apiece, then turned and darted down the hillside toward the point where lay the little canoe alluded to. And thus the coast was left clear for Storm.

He turned toward Ellen, who was still standing where she had retreated.

"Ellen, once more—will you promise? 'Tis your last chance!"

"Never!" she cried, firmly.

With a howl of furious passion, Storm sprung forward and sought to seize upon her. But he met with a far more powerful resistance than he had anticipated. Still, in a few moments his strong arms encircled her form, and a cry of swiftly-descending steel, a dull *thud*, and then a cry of pain. Releasing Ellen, Carl Storm staggered back, reeling like a drunken man.

Ellen stood erect before him, her arm up-lifted, her hand clasping a knife, from the point of which slowly dripped the red blood. In the struggle, she had seized upon and drawn the weapon from his belt, striking a desperate blow in self-defense.

Storm quickly recovered from the momentary sensation of faintness the touch of cold steel had given him, as he saw that the wound was but a trifling one. Though Ellen's will had been good, her aim, unfortunately for her, had been unsteady.

"You strike viciously, my pet," laughed

Storm, as he coolly proceeded to stanch the flowing blood, while an eye kept wary watch on the maiden's actions. "Your claws are by far too sharp, and need cutting."

"You will find that I can defend myself," defiantly cried Ellen, encouraged by being armed. "The next stroke will be aimed at your heart!"

"Make it sure, then, my dear, or you're ruined," muttered Storm, his worst passions aroused. "It only needed that. I will be a dilly dallying fool no longer. You have sealed your own fate!"

"Or yours. But stop! As God hears me, if you advance one step toward me, I will kill myself. I can foil you in that way, if in no other," cried Ellen, firmly, as she poised the blood-stained steel above her bosom.

Storm paused and gazed keenly into her eyes. He could not doubt her perfect sincerity. He saw that the threat would be fulfilled.

"Are you a fool, girl?" he angrily hissed. "Would you kill yourself?"

"Better that than what you threaten. Stand back—I will strike if you advance a single step toward me."

The wolf paused, fairly at bay. A fierce oath grated from between his tightly-clinched teeth.

Just then there came a startling interruption from without. A rifle-shot—a shrill yell—a cry as of some human being in mortal agony! With a furious curse, Storm turned and rushed to the cave entrance, seizing his rifle.

CHAPTER XI.

MAD TONY.

THE disappearance of the Indian maiden, Manathe, may be easily accounted for. Ambrose bound her, as he believed, beyond the possibility of escape; but, in his haste, the cunning maiden had to some slight degree outwitted him. By swelling the muscles of her wrists, Manathe found, when relaxed, after his departure, that the bonds were comparatively easy, and at once set to work to slip them off.

This was still a work of hours, but at length she succeeded in releasing one hand, and then quickly removed the gag and unbound her feet.

To her great surprise when she emerged from the cave it was dark. Time had passed by unnoticed during her persistent struggles to free herself from the bonds.

Fearing Elk-Foot would escape before she reached the village, Manathe sprung forward as rapidly as her cramped limbs would allow, but when she at length arrived there, what she feared had come to pass. She was too late to work her will.

The village was all excitement when she reached it. Warriors, women and children were all mixed together, running hither and hither, as if bewildered and unknowing what to do.

The noise of the struggle that followed Elk-Foot's bold venture, had drawn back the majority of those who had followed their chief upon a false scent, and now they were trying to arrive at the real facts of the case. Among them was Old Pecan, half wild with rage and grief for the supposed loss of his beloved child.

Manathe uttered her whoop and sprung forward. The father and daughter met, forgetting

all the usual savage stoicism, and acting in accordance with their hearts' impulse.

In a few quick words Manathe told her story and then Old Pecan saw that he it was who had broken the treaty instead of Elk-Foot.

But the blood of the slain Kickapoos called aloud for vengeance, and a party was sent out to intercept the fugitive, if possible, while others prepared to take up the trail with the first light of day.

About mid-day, Manathe arose from a refreshing slumber, fully recovered from the fatigue she had undergone. She found that though Old Pecan still remained, the majority of the braves had set off in hopes of overtaking their daring enemy, and the village was very quiet.

The Indian maiden soon remembered her captive—for in that light she regarded Tony Ingo, the madman—and at once entered the lodge where he lay.

Tony was buried in a peaceful slumber, and his regular respirations, with the cool, moist brow, told Manathe that his fever had passed away with the night.

She had taken care that the madman received good attention and nursing since his captivity. His hair trimmed and his face freed from dirt, Tony Ingo presented a far different sight from that he had worn to her eyes when they first met in the forest. And the quick eyes of the Indian maiden were not slow to perceive this.

His delicate features, smooth, soft skin and clear complexion, made him one such as Manathe had never before gazed upon. And as she stood there now, a feeling of dread filled her heart.

She believed that his insanity was only temporary, brought on by some great calamity, and she also believed that it would have passed away with the fever when the young man awoke. This thought it was that troubled Manathe, even while she felt a strange pleasure.

Manathe knew that if he should recover his sanity, certain death, probably preceded by tortures the most exquisite, would be his portion. No longer shielded by the stamp of the Great Spirit's finger, the captive would have to answer for the Kickapoo blood his hands had shed.

These thoughts filled the maiden's mind as she stood there beside his pallet. Then with a start Tony Ingo opened his eyes.

They were fixed full upon the face of the Indian maiden. Manathe shrunk back with a low cry, hardly knowing whether she was glad or otherwise, for beyond a doubt her captive was still insane.

Tony slowly arose to his feet, and though Manathe looked for some signs of debility she could see none. It seemed as though the illness had passed away without affecting him in the least.

"Who are you?" uttered Tony, placing one hand upon the girl's shoulder, and gazing steadily into her eyes.

"I am Manathe," she replied, in her mother's tongue.

"Did Nell send you? Have you come to lead me to her?"

"No—I don't know her," and there was a flut-

tering pain at the maiden's heart that greatly surprised herself, as she turned and left the lodge.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOLF TRAPPED.

WE left Ambrose Wraxall on his journey to the smaller division of the Kickapoos, commanded by Lad Pipe, the renegade. It is necessary now that we revert to his fortunes.

After thoroughly breaking his trail, Ambrose tramped on steadily through the remainder of that night, without once pausing to rest, though sadly needing it. But he knew that once in the vicinity of the village, he would have plenty of leisure for rest.

It was nearly noon when he paused abruptly, and crouched low down in a dense bush. A small canoe was crossing the river, only a few rods before him.

Ambrose could see that this only contained a single occupant, and he a white man, but still he kept covered, not caring to run the risk of being discovered, possibly by an enemy. As the boat neared shore, it turned and kept on downstream.

Cautiously Ambrose followed after, for nearly a mile. Then the boatman landed and hastened up a hill. Wondering what was in the wind, Wraxall concealed himself near the canoe, to await his return, when he could find out whether the man was a friend or enemy.

Half an hour passed by, when two figures came into view, hastening down the hill toward the boat. Ambrose smiled significantly as he saw they were Indians; Kickapoos.

He thought of the maiden who had been murdered by his side, only a few hours previously, and from that moment the red-skins were doomed.

They entered the canoe, and lifted from it a small keg. Their motions plainly told Ambrose what were the contents of this.

"Hoob! Open Hand pays well!" grunted one of the red-skins.

"Yes, and all for a pale-face squaw. He is a fool!" chuckled the other, little thinking what emotions his words had aroused in the heart of the giant borderer.

Just then a shrill scream came soaring down from the hill-top. It was the one uttered by Ellen Todd when she was seized upon by Carl Storm.

This decided Ambrose. He knew that a woman of his own race was in peril, and it was not in his nature to stand and hear such an appeal unmoved.

His long rifle rose to his shoulder, and then its contents were buried in the heart of one of the guzzling red-skins. With a wild yell of agony, the Kickapoo sunk backward, dying.

His comrade sprung to his feet and fled at breakneck speed along the hillside. After him bounded Ambrose with giant strides, feeling that only prompt action would serve the "pale-faced squaw" that same subtle instinct told him was none other than the maiden for whom he sought.

This was the cause of the alarm that had checked Carl Storm, and drew him to the cave entrance. As he saw the fleeing Indian, hotly

pursued by a white man, his rifle came to his cheek.

But then he hesitated. In that moment he recognized his old friend, Ambrose Wraxall. Could he murder the man to whom he was indebted for scores of favors and kindnesses?

The thought of Ellen decided him. He could not lose her now. He had gone too far to retract. He must add murder to his other sins.

But this hesitation had been fatal to his hopes. In that time, though so brief, Ellen had aroused from her indecision.

She saw that whoever approached was not a friend or ally of Carl Storm's; then, if an enemy to him, it must be a friend to her.

As she saw his rifle leveled, Ellen sprung forward and flung herself violently against his back, the knife she held catching in his clothing and was wrenched from her hand. The rifle was discharged, but harmlessly, while Carl Storm was hurled headlong through the screen of bushes.

Stumbling, he fell head-first to the ground, rolling rapidly down the hillside, almost to the very feet of Wraxall. The Kickapoo had already passed by, and was fleeing at top speed, unarmed, and nearly frightened to death.

Storm scrambled hastily to his feet, but before he could collect his confused senses, a heavy blow from the rifle-butt of the borderer felled him once more.

Then, and not till then, did Ambrose realize who was the man he had dealt so summarily with. In utter amazement he stood staring down upon Carl Storm.

"Ambrose—thank God!" came a faint cry, as Ellen sprung from the cave and staggered forward with outstretched hands.

"Ellen—Nell, you here?" gasped Wraxall, trembling like a leaf.

"Save me—save me from that demon!" murmured the maiden, as she sunk forward upon the broad breast of the borderer, whose strong arms tightly encircled her form.

Ambrose, oblivious to all else save that he held her he loved so tenderly in his arms, rained passionate kisses down upon her pale face, while Nell, half-fainting, offered no resistance.

Carl Storm staggered to his feet, half-blinded with the blood that flowed from a deep gash upon his head. He saw the couple, noted the

loving endearments of the giant borderer, and with deadly hate boiling in his heart, he sprung toward them.

Something bright flashed before his eyes, and stooping, he clutched a heavy knife. It was the one that had been wrenched from Ellen's hand.

Ambrose saw nothing of this. He had eyes for nothing save the maiden whom he held in his arms. He knew nothing of the peril, until he saw a bright flash, and then a long knife seemed buried in Ellen's heart.

"If you are lost to me, no one else shall possess you!" screamed Carl Storm, as he struck the treacherous blow.

With a furious howl, Ambrose seized the weapon and turned around. Storm was just turning to flee, after his dastard blow.

One spring, and the hand of the giant borderer clutched the assassin's neck. One deadly blow, and Carl Storm lay upon the ground, his skull literally cloven in twain.

When Ambrose turned, Ellen staggered to her feet. The murderous stroke had failed. The weapon only cut a slight gash upon her breast when its force was checked, as Storm's arm struck Wraxall's shoulder.

Upon the succeeding events we need not dwell. A few brief words will suffice.

Ambrose succeeded in conveying Ellen safely to her friends, and though she mourned long over the sad fate of her parents, the painful trials she had endured during her captivity made her life of quietness seem very happy.

Tony Ingo, under Manathe's tender care, soon recovered usual health, though his mind was ever a blank. He had even forgotten the existence of his love, Nell, and after some time he wandered away from the Kickapoo village and returned to his home, where he was received by his widowed mother as one risen from the dead. With the summer flowers he faded and passed away, innocent and harmless in his latter days. Many mourned over his sad fate, none more sincerely than Ellen and Ambrose.

A year later these two were wed, and both were very happy in their after life.

The Prophet's prediction was never fulfilled, for Old Pecan died a natural death years after the date of our story.

Lad Pipe disappeared, no one knew whither.

Of Manathe we may have occasion to speak further at some future time.

THE END.

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